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# SENSITIVE OBJECTS, POLEMICAL REPRESENTATIONS AND INTERGROUP RELATIONS

## Theoretical-methodological conceptualizations and empirical illustrations

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CIS – Community of Independent States

EU – European Union

O – Objective

OR – Object of social representation

R – Result (scientific)

RM – Republic of Moldova

SR – Social representation/ social representations

SRT – Social representations theory

WHO – World Health Organization

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### Importance of the topic

Social Representation Theory (SRT), the theory that sets the theoretical foundation of this thesis, explains how social knowledge is formed and transformed in the context of intra- and inter-group interactions, i.e. how individuals create meanings and understandings about various phenomena and processes of the surrounding world and how these meanings influence their relationships with others. Since its emergence (1961), the theory has evolved to such an extent that it is considered by some authors as a distinct paradigm in the knowledge of social reality. However, as I. Marková notes (2011), SRT has been used more for empirical reasons and less for theoretical purposes. Therefore, although the theory is frequently applied in studies in the field, a number of research directions are still in their infancy, as I. Marková (2003/2004) points out.

Some research directions that need extensive exploration at the current stage would be: linguistic aspects of thematization, polyphasia in thinking and knowing (Marková, 2003/2004); the role of *themata* in generating a social representation (SR) (Moloney *et al.,* 2015), the impact of diversity, characteristic of today's communities, and how the social is currently defined (Sammut *et al.,* 2015b), discourse types and argumentative styles in controversial topics (Castro *et al.,* 2017), the role of researcher in SR studies (Flick *et al.,* 2015), the interrelationship between the individual and the social in the production of SR (Kalampalikis and Apostolidis, 2021), the link between agnotology and SR (Jodelet, 2022). Similarly, researchers have not sufficiently answered to the question: how certain SR are formed in certain contexts, determining certain social practices (Gibson, 2015).

At the same time, we find that the SR typology (Moscovici, 1988) seems to have been less used, with relatively few studies referring to this classification. However, often, even when it is mentioned, researchers only confine themselves to a presentation of the 1988 study, in which S. Moscovici briefly described this classification and to which he did not return later to develop it. Moreover, it seems incomprehensible to ignore the concept of *"polemical representation"*, which is revealing for understanding intergroup interactions and social controversies (Pop, 2012). In the current socio-political context, we believe that the study of polemical representations represents a real "gold mine", not only for the Republic of Moldova (RM), but also for other former Soviet republics.

At the same time, relatively few studies are identified that analyse the specificity of the object of representation (OR). In our view, it is necessary to clarify the following issues: whether a *classification* of ORs can be identified, i.e. what categories can be distinguished, what are their characteristics and what are the limitations of research methods in the study of various categories of ORs; the *dilemmas* faced by researchers and research subjects in investigative approaches that address various ORs, some of which are sensitive; *the specificity of SR* generated by various ORs, etc. At the same time, it is also necessary to clarify *the path* that various SRs (hegemonic, polemical and

emancipative) follow in the social environment, how various SRs are *"imposed"*, *"negotiated"* or *"shadowed"* at intergroup level.

For these reasons, this study examines aspects related to the specificity of **sensitive objects**, examining how these objects are articulated in social interactions and what kinds of representations they generate. Special attention is given to the concept of **polemical representation**, a concept somewhat ignored by scholarship in the field, but extremely important for explaining **intergroup relations**, historical conflicts and social controversies. Therefore, these concepts – "sensitive objects" and "polemical representations" – are analysed also in terms of how they influence "intergroup relations". For illustrative purposes, case studies are presented in which polemical representations from three domains are examined: *socio-political*, *socio-historical* and *socio-medical*. In summary, the scientific problem derives from the need to conceptualise a framework, integrating theoretical, methodological and empirical illustrations, on the role that sensitive objects play in the generation of polemical representations and the implications they produce on intergroup relations. Moreover, through this paper, we want to make some contributions to the development of a new scientific direction in the field of SR, namely: the *narrative perspective in the study of sensitive objects and polemical representations*.

**Framing the topic in international, national, inter- and transdisciplinary studies**

At **the international level**, the SR theme underwent a real turnaround in the 70s and 80s of the last century, especially after the reprinting and translation into several languages of the *La Psychanalyse, son image et son public* (Paris: PUF, 1961), among the first studies being those by C. Herzlich (1973) on the SR of illness, I. Litton and J. Potter (1985) on the SR of protest actions or D. Jodelet (1989) on the SR of mental illness. After 1990, with the initiation of collaborations with Western institutions, the theory also aroused the interest of researchers in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics. In 2011, the 50th anniversary of the SRT was celebrated in Naples, considered one of the most important theories in social psychology, among the participants were those who accompanied S. Moscovici from the beginning in founding this theory (Neculau and Ernst, 2011). So far, 16 international conferences have been organized with SR as their theme, the last one was held in Bogota, Colombia, in 2023. In 1993, also an international PhD programme was created (http://www.europhd.net), coordinated by A.S. de Rosa (Sapienza University of Rome, Italy).

In Romania, important contributions to the dissemination and development of the concept of SR and SRT were made by the *School of Social Psychology* in Iasi, under the leadership of A. Neculau (M. Curelaru, T. Constantin, D. Nastas, O. Onici, etc.), including through the collaborations that Prof. Neculau had with researchers from the RM (I. Negură, M. Șleahtițchi, L. Negură, etc.). In the former USSR, the first article presenting S. Moscovici's theory was written by A. Dontsov and T. Emelianova (1984). Currently, among the Russian researchers concerned with SR perspective we would mention

T. Emelianova, O. Gulevitch, I. Bovina and others.

The SR issue and various socio-political and cultural challenges in recent years (transition dilemmas, changes in the collective mindset, geopolitical uncertainties, etc.) have also been of interest to researchers in Moldova. Thus, in the **national academic context**, research has been carried out on *SR of leaders* (Șleahtițchi, 1995, 1998, 2019); *SR of the homeland* (Negură, 1996); *SR of power* (Negură, 2004); *SR of protest movements* (Cojocaru, 2006); *SR of the European Union* (Negură *et al.*, 2011); *SR of the psychologist* (Mîrleanu *et al.*, 2013; Cojocaru and Răileanu, 2020); *SR of work among teachers* (Sârbu-Popescu, 2016); *SR of lifelong learning* (Mihailov, 2016; Bolboceanu, 2019; Bucun and Cerlat, 2020, etc.); *SR of the family* (Briceag *et al.*, 2017; Cazacu, 2018), etc. We believe that these studies offer perspectives of analysis at interdisciplinary, comparative and intercultural levels, making essential contributions to the understanding of social phenomena.

Representational processes, although they have as a fundamental theoretical support the psychology of cognitive processes, cannot be dissociated from the social, from the characteristics of the context and from the dominant social thinking (Neculau, 2004b). Situated at the interface between the psychological and the social, they are of interest to several socio-humanistic sciences (Jodelet, 1997). For these reasons, this study evidently transcends the boundaries of general psychology (as a field that investigates psychological phenomena and knowledge processes), with (necessary and inevitable) links at the **intradisciplinary** level with communication psychology, social psychology, political psychology and **interdisciplinarily** – with social anthropology and history. We will briefly consider these connections.

- **Communication Psychology**: just as SR is the product of interactions, the content of an SR is transmitted and shaped through intra- and inter-group communication processes. Implicitly, the reference to the field of communication psychology is absolutely necessary from the perspective of a better knowledge of the communication process and the implications of this process in the elaboration of representations. Moreover, in the context of the present research, we argue that it is precisely in the context of communication with *Others* that social objects become sensitive objects, generating polemical representations at the intergroup level.

- **Social and Political Psychology**: theories from these fields are useful to understand how the content of SR is structured by intergroup dynamics. In recent years, several studies have emerged relating SRT to a number of specific themes: active minorities (Staerklé *et al.*, 2011), civic behaviour (Bermúdez and Juárez-Romero, 2019), political participation (Howarth *et al.*, 2014; Batel and Castro, 2016) and so on.

- **Social anthropology**: as the object of study of anthropology is the interactions of individuals in different social contexts, including how various symbols and rituals are generated and used, the link with this field is indispensable. D. Jodelet (1989) is among the first authors to refer to

the anthropological perspective in the study of SR.

• **History**: just as SR, especially SR of the past, are the product of various versions, another area to which we closely refer to in this research is that of history. Studies in the field demonstrate that the dynamics of the interplay between hegemonic and polemical representations create social frameworks of memory and versions of the past (Liu and Hilton, 2005; Tileaga, 2009: Wagoner, 2015 and others).

**Results of previous studies**

As the theoretical and empirical support of the research relies on three basic concepts: *(1) sensitive objects, (2) polemical representations* and *(3) intergroup relations,* we will briefly refer to the most important results with reference to them.

**(1) Sensitive objects** and the way in which subjects' discourses are articulated according to the perceptions of categorical belonging and positionality of researchers have been discussed in several studies: SR of Roma (Deschamps and Guimelli, 2005), SR of Islam (Flament *et al.,* 2006 *apud* Guimelli, 2009/2010), SR of wine (Lo Monaco and Guimelli, 2011), etc. Researchers show that a series of socio-ideological and normative conditions can intensify the sensitive character of an OR, leading to variations and camouflages in the public expression of representational contents.

**(2)** In relation to the classification of SR proposed by S. Moscovici (1988), it should be noted that some authors wonder whether we can really speak of three different types of SR, as described by Moscovici, or of three distinct stages in the evolution of an SR. One of the essential questions that has not been answered is whether we can speak of **polemical representation** as a separate category or whether there is a transition, an evolution of the same representation over time, depending on changes in the socio-political context and the dynamics of intergroup relations (e.g. the transition from *polemical* to *hegemonic representation* or vice versa).

**(3) Intergroup relations**, another central concept of the work, are a direct consequence of the way in which collective memories and polemical representations are intertwined in experiencing the event. Although SR have a crucial impact on intergroup dynamics, this connection – between SR and intergroup relations – is becoming a hot topic for researchers, especially after 2000 (Eicher *et al.*, 2011). One of the widely disputed issues today is the relationship between representations and social memory and how it affects interactions between social groups. One example is L. Licata *et al.* (2012-2016): COST IS1205 *"Social psychological dynamics of historical representations in the enlarged European Union"*. The main objective of this project was to develop knowledge with reference to the role of past SR in the construction of social identity and in the dynamics of intergroup conflicts (from a psychohistorical perspective).

Based on these introductory notes, the **aim of the paper** is to determine the theoretical, methodological and empirical foundations regarding the *sensitive objects* in the genesis of *polemical*

*representations* according to the oppositional dynamics at the level of *intergroup relations*.

**Research objectives**

**O1.** To elucidate the current developments and trends in SR studies, with a view to identifying research directions that are currently debated and require extensive exploration;

**O2.** To articulate the theoretical and methodological aspects relevant for a study on SR, in order to develop a theoretical-reflexive model that could be used as a framework for the analysis of a SR at the beginning of research;

**O3.** Theoretical clarification of the concept of *"sensitive object"*, highlighting the characteristics of sensitive objects, normative-ethics dilemmas and affective-cognitive implications of the interaction between researcher and subjects in their study, implicitly the impact that sensitive objects have on discursive productions;

**O4.** To identify studies on the classification of SR (Moscovici, 1988), from the time of its first publication (1988) to the present stage, in order to elaborate meta-analytical syntheses with reference to the concept of *"polemical representation"*, highlighting their specificities and characteristics;

**O5.** To examine case studies from the recent history of the RM (from three domains: socio-historical, socio-political and socio-medical), which can be approached as *"sensitive objects"*, to elucidate how *"polemical representations"* are shaped according to these objects of representation;

**O6.** To highlight the specificity of contextual conditions (social, media and representational), social practices and intergroup dynamics with implications for the genesis and elaboration of *"polemical representations*";

**O7.** To clarify the potential psychosocial trajectories in the evolution of *"polemical representations"* according to oppositional dynamics at the intergroup level.

**The research results** were presented, discussed and **approved** through: a) activities carried out during the internship at Sapienza University (Rome, Italy, 2015); b) presentation of a monograph on the thesis topic at the EUROINVENT book fair (Iasi, Romania, 2019); c) communications at international and national scientific events (in total – **25**).

**The research results** were **implemented**: a) in the didactic activities, carried out through the mobility programme at the University of Beira Interior, Portugal (02.05-06.05.2022); b) in workshops and training courses: *"Implications of SO in the genesis of controversial SR: empirical illustrations and theoretical applications"* (workshop at ICI Conference, 2016); *"Qualitative research design"* (workshop at CIPA, 2022); *"Change management: psychosocial aspects"* (training course, 2021-2023); c) in university courses: *Social psychology, Psychology of intergroup relations, Qualitative research*, etc.); d) in publications (in total – **41**).

## THESIS SUMMARY

What was the research trajectory that oriented me towards the issue of sensitive objects and polemical representations? During the research for my PhD thesis, I was increasingly becoming aware that I was studying what could be called “a sensitive object of representation”. Looking into the phenomenon of protest, I opted along the way for a predominantly qualitative strategy. Using an iterative approach (*see* Agabrian, 2004), I kept formulating and re-formulating new questions and assumptions throughout the research as new aspects were revealed. For these reasons, just as the this approach only leads progressively, through successive approximations, to the conceptualisation and operationalisation of the object of study, I could neither anticipate certain aspects of the phenomenon I was studying, nor adhere to a rigid design. Respectively, I resorted to a constant process of re-dimensioning of the research strategy and methodology and, consequently, to a refinement of the analysis once I was able to better understand the research phenomenon.

Convinced that social behaviour is a necessary sample for the given study, that the historical period proposed for analysis is not strictly temporal, that it would extend into the present, with its reminiscences and persistent foundations, I have engaged, without intending to do so, in a permanent process of observation and analysis of daily manifestations in the street, transport or public spaces (a whole arsenal of *unprovoked data*). Human existence presents itself as a processualism of causes and effects, of banal determinisms or shocking coincidences. To what extent, or especially when, does the citizen, caught up in the whirlwind of these manifestations, become involved in their flow, intervene, react, protest? Unwittingly, we witness the implosion of "unprovoked data" related to the phenomenon under study, with privileged situations for observing the phenomenon *in situ*. Although at the beginning I only intended to study the protest actions of the 2000s, the similarities, the necessary and systematic reference to other similar acts of protest up to this period called for a comparative research, until the analytical route was traced to the *"fire zone"*, to the epicentre of the long-lasting discontent, to the origin of the revolt, the years 1987-1989.

I then turned my attention to the fact that SRs are primarily created and re-created through social interactions; implicitly, these collective products are formed through lived social experiences and are inseparably linked to communication (Marková, 2011). The analysis of the media coverage of various protest actions, initially without established structure of analysis, then in an increasingly structured analytical framework, led me to the idea that protest is not a neutral OR, but rather should be analysed as one of the categories of *sensitive objects*. I then understood that, given the media polarisation and intergroup social tensions generated by these media counter narratives, I needed to identify people who had experienced the protest, both as participants with others who shared the same beliefs that prompted the protest actions, and as *opponents* in relation to others who did not share these beliefs, and challenge them to talk about this experience.

After the completion of my PhD project, the issue of sensitive objects followed me for a long time. During these years I wanted to return to the topic and develop the ideas briefly presented in my PhD thesis. Sometime later, I also discovered the concept of polemical representation. I confess that it was a real revelation to learn about this concept, which is extremely significant for understanding social controversies and intergroup antagonisms, with a slight regret that I did not learn about it earlier, even during the research for my PhD thesis. Regarding sensitive objects, I must admit that I have often found it difficult to define clearly: *what are sensitive objects anyway?* My attempts to define them were often blocked by certain "wooden moments", failing to catch a distinct and clear outline. Although in my mind they made sense; they were like fragments of memories, which the amnesia sufferer tries to recover in a coherent structure. Or like the few notes that haunt the musician's mind, wanting to become melody. The interest in this issue therefore derives from the experience of researching a *sensitive object of representation*.

The content of this research is structured in **seven chapters**. In essence, this structure follows the title, the aim and the proposed objectives of the thesis: in each chapter we refer to the three key concepts which also appear in the title ("sensitive objects", "polemical representations" and "intergroup relations"), presenting, depending on the proposed objectives of a particular chapter, theoretical, methodological or empirical illustrations related to these concepts.

**CHAPTER 1, "Social objects, social representations and intergroup relations: theoretical clarifications"** (35 p.), describes the state of the art in the proposed research area, presenting theoretical syntheses with reference to the most important studies in the field of SR. We begin this chapter with a brief incursion into the evolution of SRT, analysing the origins of the theory, its interpretative and applicative value, including current trends in the field, while motivating our position on framing theoretical perspectives in an eclectic view in order to develop a model of the emergence of polemical representations and the role of sensitive objects and oppositional dynamics in this process. At the same time, we set out to analyse ***current developments and trends*** in the field of SR, identifying research directions that are both controversial and require ***extensive exploration*** (*see* Table 1).

**Table 1. Developments, current trends, and theoretical debates in the field of SR**

| **Current developments and trends 2000-2022** | **Authors** |
|---|---|
| **TRS and SR related concepts: themata, antinomies, cognitive polyphasia, etc.** | |
| Linguistic aspects of thematisation<br>The problem of antinomies | Marková (2003/2004) |
| The role of *themata* in generating SR | Moloney *et al.* (2015) |
| Polyphasia in thought and knowledge | Marková (2003/2004); Mauro and Castro (2012); Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernández (2015); Martinez (2018) and others. |
| **The communication process in the formation and transformation of SR** | |
| Genres of speech and communication | Marková (2003/2004) |

| | |
|---|---|
| The link between SRT and the historical and cultural specificity of communication and *Ego-Alter-Object* dynamics | |
| The relationship between semiotics and communication in SRT | Veltri (2015) |
| The role of emotions in transmitting and communicating SR | Breakwell (2015) |
| Discourse types and argumentative styles in controversial topics | Castro *et al.* (2017) |
| SR and media<br>The role of online media in SR training (especially in the case of dominant groups) | Höijer (2011)<br>Mannarini *et al.* (2020) |
| Agnotology (study of ignorance) and SR | Jodelet (2022) |
| **The process of investigating an SR** | |
| The role of the researcher in SR studies | Flick *et al.* (2015) |
| Use of visual methods in SR studies | Martikainen and Hakokõngäs (2022) |
| **SR in action** | |
| The relationship between representations and social memory | Neculau (2001; 2004b) |
| Polemic SR, intergroup interactions, and social controversies | Howarth (2006) |
| SR and the "conspiracy mentality" | Moscovici (2006; 2020) |
| Social and political implications of SR | Voelklein and Howarth (2005) |
| SR and power relations | Blackness *et al.* (2019) |
| SR and climate change/environmental issues | Jaspal *et al.* (2014); Castro *et al.* (2017). |
| The relationship between identity processes and SR | Breakwell (2015); Flores-Falacios and Oswald (2019). |
| Applications of SRT in IT and organisational analysis | Weerasinghe *et al* (2018). |
| SR and the pandemic crisis (COVID-19) | Fèlicien *et al.* (2020); Jaspal and Nerlich (2020); Sitto and Lubinga (2020); Pizarro *et al.* (2020); Justo *et al.* (2020); Fasanelli *et al.* (2020); Apostolidis *et al.* (2020); de Rosa and Mannarini (2020); Pàez and Pèrez (2020); Emiliani *et al.* (2020) and others. |
| **Debates at this stage (2010-2022)** | **Authors** |
| What is the role of SR in grounding the structure and content of scientific knowledge (the inverse relationship than the one studied by S. Moscovici – the transformation of scientific knowledge at the common-sense level)? | Howard (2006 *apud* Saaki, 2010) |
| What is the relationship between science and common knowledge in the educational context, considering that different ways of thinking and knowing develop in the educational process? | Saaki (2010) |
| What influence do representations exert on intergroup relations in a given social context? | Voelkin and Howarth (2005 *apud* Gibson, 2015) |
| What is the impact of *diversity* and the way "social" is currently defined?<br>What are the criteria for defining social groups and communities? | Sammut *et al.* (2015b) |
| What are the differences between attitudes and SR? | Sammut *et al.* (2015b) |
| How are *certain* SRs formed in *certain* social contexts, determining *certain* social practices? | Gibson (2015) |
| What is the role of the individual in building SR? | Breakwell (2015) |
| What are the differences between individual and social representations? | Lahlou (2021) |
| Are we talking about three distinct types of SR (hegemonic, polemical and emancipative), the same SR during its evolution, or certain representational contents – hegemonic, emancipative or polemical that may be in the content of an SR? | Pop (2012), Lahlou (2021) and others. |

Also in this context, the specificity of SR as a product of social thought and the elements underlying the formation of a representation were examined: social objects, *nexuses*, *themata* and social practices. Analysing the classification of SR (Moscovici, 1988) and the studies that have targeted this classification, we highlighted specific features for hegemonic, emancipative and polemical SR (*see* Tab. 2).

**Table 2. Characteristics of SR *(hegemonic, emancipatory and polemical)***

| **Hegemonic SR** | **Emancipative SR** | **polemical SR** |
|---|---|---|
| • are shared by a majority group or are imposed by a dominant group<br>• are not formed within the group, but are transmitted in pre-established contents<br>• dominant, uniform, coercive<br>• consensual, indisputable;<br>• prevails in most social practices<br>• similar to collective ideologies or representations and remain relatively unchanged for a long time<br>• correspond rather to the core (stable, historically and ideologically determined elements)<br>• resistant to change, they remain relatively unchanged for a long time<br>• define a group's identity and legitimise social hierarchies, power and domination relations<br>• are found mainly in homogeneous societies where there is little conflict between groups | • complementary views (about a phenomenon) – they circulate socially without conflicting with each other and without creating dissensions in intergroup relations<br>• are autonomous, not in contradiction with hegemonic SRs<br>• correspond to the interests of a minority group which, in time, could be widely accepted<br>• develops in a context of inter-group cooperation<br>• supports cognitive polyphasia | • arise in social conflict and are determined by antagonistic intergroup relations<br>• given their conflictual nature, are not shared by society as a whole<br>• at the societal level, have a peripheral, marginal status<br>• is an attempt by a minority group to change the hegemonic SR<br>• also presents itself as a way of challenging the status of a group in a society<br>• are an indicator of social conflict and occur in non-omogeneous societies<br>• are SR of conflicting groups. are based on different, opposing, mutually exclusive anchors<br>• are expressed as a kind of dialogue with an imaginary interlocutor, and the discourse is often oriented towards devaluing the Other<br>• are based primarily on beliefs<br>• are transmitted through typical propaganda mechanisms |

At the end of this chapter, we present some studies that illustrate the research fields we examine in the paper (socio-historical, socio-political, and socio-medical) and we launch some premises for the conceptualization of polemical representations and sensitive objects according to the specificity of intergroup relations.

**CHAPTER 2, "Methodological perspectives on the process of investigating a social representation"** (30 p.) examines the specific path of an investigation aimed at studying a SR, including a polemical representation. I argue in this chapter that in studying SR it is important to know both its *content* and, more importantly, the *context* that generated a particular representation and, prospectively, the *impact* that this representation has on intergroup relations in real social

contexts. The argumentative approach is based on three essential questions, namely (1) how is SR articulated in a reflexive manner at the start of the investigative process; (2) how is SR shaped as a process and as a product in a social context; and (3) how to carry out the investigative process in order to decode the interactions emerging in the dynamics of a SR, i.e., which methods or interactions would be most appropriate in the study of a SR to ensure the authenticity of discursive productions? ***The theoretical-reflexive model*** we propose, with reference to the genesis and evolution of a SR, could be used as a framework for the analysis of a SR at the beginning of its research (*see* Fig. 1).

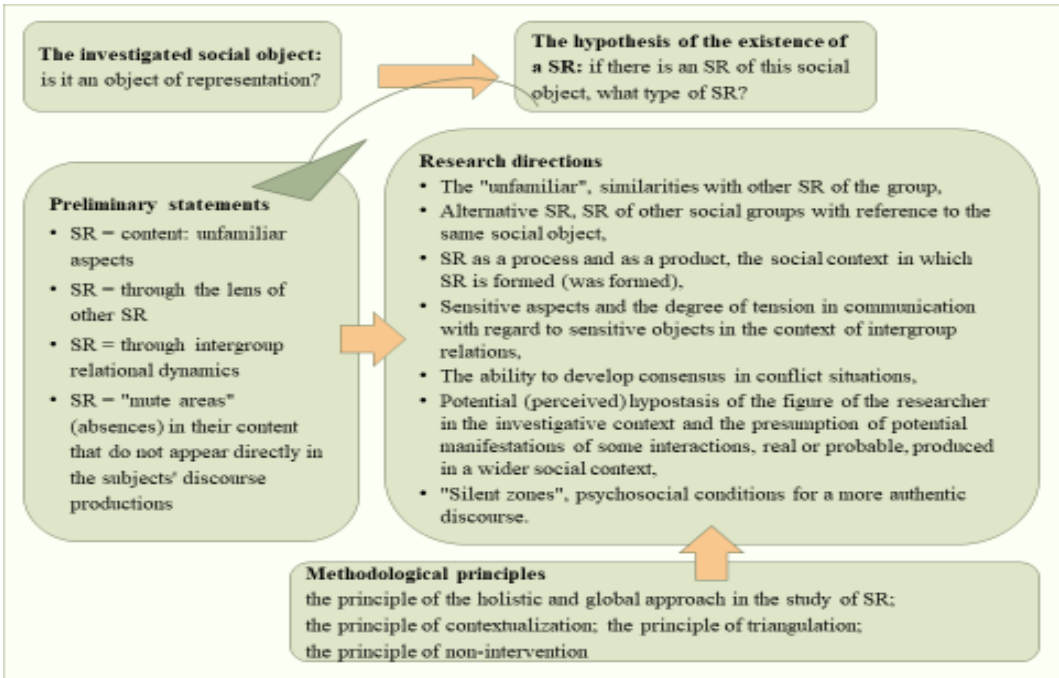



**Figure 1. Epistemic notes in investigating social representations**

At the same time, in this section I describe the research strategy and methods, including the case studies we present in chapters 5-7. In Chapters 5, 6 and 7, in line with the requirements for a case study, we present specific theoretical issues with reference to the sensitive object and the polemical representations we analyse, methodological aspects and research results (*see* Fig. 2).

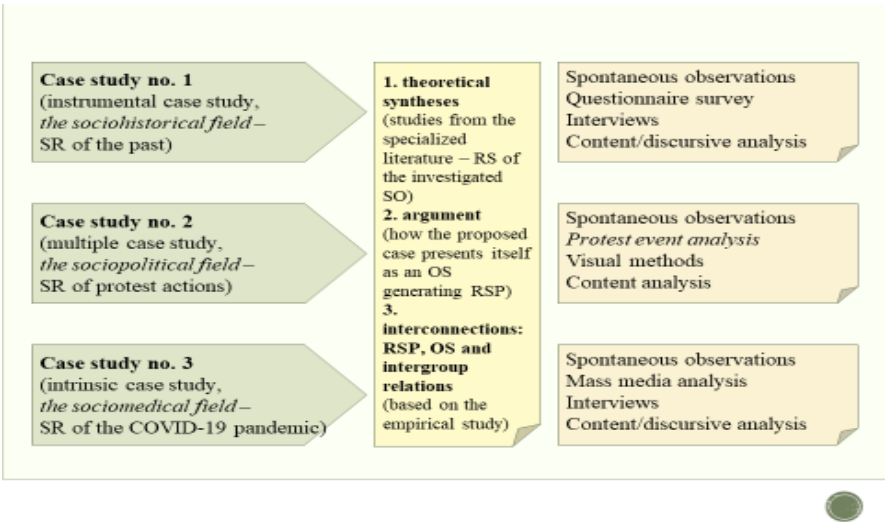



**Figure 2. Analytical structure for case studies**

Each case study begins with ***theoretical syntheses***, based on the results of research in the literature that has studied various SR related aspects of the object we study (theoretical framework of the case study and premises for the research). We then present a series of ***reasons*** arguing how the object under investigation (as the case may be, the COVID-19 pandemic, collective protests or the past) presents itself as a sensitive object that generates polemical representations. Respectively, based on the ***results of the study*** (according to each case separately), we examine the connections between the sensitive object and the polemical representations it generates, as well as the implications these representations produce on intergroup relations.

Due to the need to identify the non-expressible and non-declarative contents of SR ("hidden areas" or "areas of tension"), I argue the importance of a qualitative or narrative research. Just as researcher-subject interaction (and implicitly, the discourses they produce) are strongly influenced by various psychosocial phenomena, researchers of SR (especially polemical ones) should recognize the possibility of *"absences"* in representational content and ask what are those representational elements that do not appear directly in subjects' discursive productions and, more importantly, why are they not publicly expressed? In a qualitative study, participants have the opportunity to describe their attitudes, beliefs or experiences in their own words, which allows for a better understanding of them, and thus an in-depth examination of the phenomenon and its SR (in this way, we explore not only the content of a SR, but also find out why members of a social group have these SRs, how they explain them, what attitudes, beliefs or experiences have formed them, etc.).

Another aspect I bring up is that the researcher must capture the ***dynamics*** and ***evolution of*** the phenomenon studied in terms of social changes, cultural pluralisms and group affiliations. Just as SRs are the product of social interactions, their genesis, evolution and public manifestation are also the outcome of these interactions. Often, what we know in the end is only this product (SR), the result of social interactions, but not the actual process of interaction. Thus, when investigating SR, it is important to learn their *content*, the *context* that generated them and the *impact* these representations might have in real social contexts.

**CHAPTER 3, "Sensitive objects: conceptualisations and specific features in their study"** (29 p.), includes reflections and theoretical findings with reference to the concept of ***sensitive object***. At the same time, the specifics of "sensitive research" (dealing with sensitive experiences, conducted on vulnerable or hard-to-reach groups and involving potential threats to the researcher and/or research participants) are also discussed. Generally following a qualitative approach, the study of sensitive subjects is in line with the criteria of sensitive research.

Based on the reviewed studies, I provide conceptual clarifications for sensitive objects, highlighting the specificity of these ORs, the risks and difficulties that arise in conducting research dealing with sensitive issues, including the impact that sensitive objects have on discursive

productions. Based on these analyses, I delineate the characteristics of sensitive objects, normative-ethical dilemmas and cognitive-affective implications of the interaction between researcher and subjects in the study of these ORs.

I also asked *how ORs can become sensitive objects*? More precisely, what are those socio-ideological and contextual conditions that make them so in the collective imagination? At the same time, how do ORs become *sensitive* through communication (public and private discourses), intergroup interaction and social practices? It is known that not every social object is at the same time an OR, as it must meet certain criteria. However, there are social objects which, although they seem to meet specific criteria to be addressed as ORs, their representation seems to be apparently *absent*. These objects contain in their representational field opinions, beliefs or judgments likely to call into question valued or accepted social values or norms; therefore, their public expression would be a violation of these norms and values (Deschamps and Guimelli, 2005). As some studies showed, in the relationship with the *Other,* including in research interactions, sensitive issues sanctioned by society (but nevertheless accepted by the social group) will be *masked* in a public register and will be *unmasked* in a private register. Sensitivity may be determined by: a) normative and counter-normative pressures of social behaviour and the degree of legitimation by public institutions; b) social practices, behaviours and attitudes disapproved of by society; c) the nature of intergroup relations (unresolved historical controversies, "reprehensible" or "shameful" events in the ingroup's history, etc.).

In this case, we are talking about ORs that generate conflict dynamics at intergroup level, following a prolonged period of inability to develop a social consensus on them. These ORs are considered to be ***sensitive objects*** (social objects of collective importance, with strong identity and symbolic stakes, which include in their representational content counter-normative aspects, are based on intergroup contradictions and antagonisms, are significant for one group and threatening for other social groups). Being subject to self-censorship in various social interactions, they can often remain *"absent"* during the attempt to decode them through a typical investigative approach. The question faced by researchers investigating the representation of these social objects would be: is there or is there not a SR present in this case? The apparent absence of representation of these social objects is revealed by a poorly differentiated representational content (the presence of "mute zones", with several cognitive elements of ambiguous status), which implies difficulties in clearly grasping some central elements in the SR content.

In order to clarify the specificity of sensitive objects, we have highlighted their ***characteristics*** according to: a) the process of representational elaboration; b) the specificity of communication and interaction with the *Other*; c) intergroup relations; d) socio-ideological conditions that amplify the sensitive character; e) the type of SR and research methods and f) representational content (*see* Table 3).

**Table 3. Characteristics of sensitive objects in the representation process**

| Criteria | Characteristics of sensitive objects |
|---|---|
| **The process of representational elaboration** | The social object may remain unfamiliar |
| **Specifics of communication and interaction with the *Other*** | Lack of intersubjective *understanding of objects (*Lahlou, 2021)<br>Presence of *masking* strategies in interactions with outgroup members and *unmasking* within the ingroup<br>Avoiding discussions in public |
| **Intergroup relations** | Tense, confrontational<br>Polarized discourses and intergroup oppositional dynamics<br>The plurality and diversity of discourses often create conflicts, being determined by intergroup contradictions and antagonisms |
| **Socio-ideological conditions** | Authoritarian regimes that stifle freedom of opinion<br>Anti-normative pressures<br>Sudden contextual changes |
| **What kind of SR?** | *Polemic* representations (Moscovici, 1988) |
| **What kind of methods?** | Questionnaires with modified consemn, in-depth interviews, focus groups, observations |
| **Representational content** | Difficulties in structuring content at the level of the collective imagination<br>Undefined perceptions, contradictory discourses<br>The theme of social recognition is central, predominant<br>Ingroup meanings and values and outgroup threats<br>Anti-normative, unacceptable and therefore non-expressible beliefs |

We have identified two categories of sensitive objects: in the first case, due to its highly sensitive nature from the germ of representation, the social object remains poorly defined at the representational level; in the second case, the social object becomes sensitive over time, through a confrontation with a denied or contested representation of the *Other* or as a result of cognitive restructuring. The former is therefore difficult to be *represented* in the collective imaginary and the latter is difficult to be *re-presented* in an intergroup context.

While studying sensitive objects, we need to reflect on issues such as: why certain elements of the content of SR are not directly expressed and why they do not appear in the data we collect; what are the factors that influence the discursive productions and how could we access the "unspoken" part of SR; respectively, what are those psychosocial conditions of interaction that favour the emergence of a more authentic discourse? We found that, in relation to a sensitive object, subjects produce a normative discourse in ordinary conditions of interaction, therefore, to access the latent content of the subjects' discourse, special conditions (climate of trust, certainty and security) and a permanent readjustment of the research strategy are necessary.

**CHAPTER 4, "Polemic Representations: conceptualisations and specific features in their study"** (38 p.) theorizes the concept of ***polemical representation***, highlighting stages in the

evolution of studies on this concept, specific themes, characteristics of polemical representations**,** contextual conditions and intergroup relations with an impact on the dynamics of these SR. The chapter concludes with some suggestions of further directions for the study of polemical SR.

Although in recent years there has been a certain increase in the number of studies that address issues related to polemical representations, there is relatively little research that examines the evolution of this concept and how it is used in empirical studies, the phenomena that trigger the emergence of polemical representations or the impact of these representations at the societal and integral level. From this point of view, we believe that the analysis we propose in this chapter, structured in three distinct phases (1988-2000; 2001-2011 and 2012-2022), from the time of the first article on this topic (1988) to the present, will contribute to filling this gap.

The concept of "polemical representation" was first described by S. Moscovici in an article published in 1988. These representations, writes S. Moscovici, arise in the context of conflict or social controversy, manifest themselves in intergroup contradictions and are often expressed as a kind of dialogue with an imaginary interlocutor. The main debate concerning S. Moscovici's classification is whether we can still speak of three separate categories: *hegemonic, emancipative* or *polemical*, or of an evolution of a SR in the process of its formation. Some authors admit that they are three distinct categories, others, on the contrary, believe that they are rather stages in the dynamics of a SR or even a different mode of expression for the same representation in different contexts (*see* Table 4).

**Table 4. Current debates on SR classification**

| **Are there separate categories?** | **Stages in the evolution of the same SR?**<br>**Different wording for the same SR?** |
|---|---|
| **Moscovici (1988)** – S. Moscovici describes the three types of SR (hegemonic, emancipative and polemical) as three distinct categories.<br><br>**G. Breakwell** (2007) – admits that they are distinct SRs, illustrating these categories by SR of hazard under conditions of social risk amplification.<br><br>**A. Gillespie** (2008) – accepts that there are clear differences between these three categories.<br><br>**Pop (2012)** – even if polemical SRs can be generated by the same *themata*, they should be analysed as a separate category of SR and not just as dimensions within a SR. | **M.-L. Rouquette** (1994 *apud* Pop, 2012) – any representation has polemical aspects in its content; intergroup conflict is essentially a conflict between the various representations that these groups have.<br><br>**G. Duveen** (2000) – the dynamics of intergroup relations are marked by the attempt of different groups to legitimize a hegemonic status of some SRs.<br><br>**G. Breakwell** (2001 *apud* Pop, 2012) – asks whether we can speak of distinct representations or of different stages in the evolution of the same representation.<br><br>**L. Liu (2004)** – rejects the idea of separate categories of SR, considering that we can rather speak of three different ways of sharing SR (hegemonic, emancipative and polemical). A SR can be hegemonic, emancipative and polemical at the same time.<br><br>**A. Muchi-Faina (2004 *apud* Pop, 2012)** - hegemonic or polemical contents can coexist in the content of the same representation, given the antinomies generated by *themata*, as the source of SR. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | **S. Lahlou (2021)** analyses the three types of SR – hegemonic, emancipative and polemical according to the degree of consensus and similarity in the content of individual representations in relation to a social object. The author considers that we are basically talking not about three distinct SRs, but about the trajectory of one and the same representation at different stages of its formation. |

The analysis of studies from 1988-2000 leads us to note that, in the early years, the classification seems to be somewhat "in a shadow": relatively few studies, discussions or theoretical developments are recorded. Even if the SR classification is used in empirical studies, fewer proposals are made for its further development. In general, the studies in which this classification is applied are more limited to describing the types of SR (hegemonic, emancipative or polemical). After 2000, the classification was brought back into the field of theoretical and empirical studies, giving rise to debate as to whether we can still speak of three separate categories: *hegemonic, emancipative* or *polemical*, or of an evolution of a SR in the process of formation. In our opinion, both versions are likely: polemical SR can exist for a relatively long time as a separate category or it can transform over time into an emancipative or even hegemonic one (depending on the level of conflict at intergroup level).

In recent years, we could speak of an acceptance, an "absorption" of S. Moscovici's (1988) classification within the academic community: there is an increasing interest in this classification in various empirical studies. However, most studies apply the SR classification without proposing any further development of it, and fewer offer clarifications on the time trajectories of representation according to intergroup relational dynamics.

In modern societies, we find evidence of polemical rather than hegemonic representations (Moscovici, 1988). We note that the studies of polemical SRs reviewed in this chapter cover diverse thematic areas, but common to these representations are the contours and context of conflict at the intergroup level. SR are constructed in opposition to other representations, thus those who impose a certain viewpoint are bound to confront another, is the conclusion of several studies reviewed in this chapter. In other words, as long as conflict persists over certain issues that give rise to polemical debates, and thus to intergroup dissent, polemical SRs will persist. In this sense, how SRs are expressed in oppositional intergroup contexts remains a topical issue that needs further development.

According to the studies analysed, common themes that generate polemical SRs are: *historical conflicts and the past* (territorial claims, ideological or religious supremacy); *stereotypes and intergroup relations* (in relation to certain vulnerable or marginalised groups, including migrants and refugees); *Islam and anti-Zionism; social change and political participation* (democracy, collective protests or social movements); *climate and biodiversity* (climate change, environmental problems and pollution); in the context of the pandemic – polemical representations related to *COVID-19*.

Regarding the genesis of polemical representations, at the level of theoretical assumptions we could delimit two trajectories: 1) polemical representations originate from unresolved social or historical controversies that still are unresolved and 2) polemical representations are rejected by the dominant group and their thematization does not occur in the public domain. The first would be the situation when the representations stem from certain historical controversies that have not been resolved and have become sensitive themes for next generations. In this case, the content of polemical representations is not formed based on direct knowledge or experience of the group but is related to past ingroup events and social practices that are passed on to later generations. The second occurs when polemical representations are strongly rejected by the dominant group and group members do not perceive themselves capable of public debate or there is a risk of sanctions or even persecution. This can occur in the context of an authoritarian regime or in the case of stigmatised groups. It can also be invoked here when polemical representations are not expressed publicly to avoid potential social dissension and intergroup conflict. This is the case when SRs reach a peak that makes them extremely disturbing, intolerable, and unbearable issues, which means that *thematization* related to these representations does not occur. In this way, the reason why sensitive topics are not discussed (at least, not in public spaces) is the belief that consensus cannot be reached at intergroup level.

An issue that requires further study concerns the dynamics and tensions that arise in the process of imposing SR, which can become hegemonic, and the *"silencing"* of polemical SR (Howarth, 2006). SR develops and transforms over time, even hegemonic SR are subject to contestation and are reformulated in everyday discourses (Marková, 2003/2004). Following from this, another topic of interest would also be: how long does a polemical representation remain *polemical*? It is necessary to analyse how and under what ideological conditions polemical representations turn into hegemonic representations; what happens to polemical representations that do not reach a hegemonic status and how are polemical representations negotiated at intergroup and societal levels?

We could assume that polemical representations will be negotiated until a certain social consensus is reached, being accepted by the majority and even becoming hegemonic, or will remain controversial issue, *expressed* or *not expressed* in intergroup relations. In relation to alternative representations, in an intergroup context marked by social tensions, a polemical representation may be rather *hidden*. Especially if we are talking about a contested alternative representation. In other words, in order to better understand the content of an SR, whether *expressible* (discernable) or *non-expressible* (non-discernablle), we need to examine in depth the process of production of that representation.

With reference to the SR classification proposed by S. Moscovici, one of the problems that have not been elucidated so far is the following: can we talk about polemical representations as a separate, autonomous category, or is it a transition of the same representation over time, from a

polemical representation to one with hegemonic status? In our opinion, both versions are possible and we suggest two premises for investigation: 1) polemical representations can exist for a relatively long time, having an autonomous status in a social setting, whether openly expressed or tabooed, and 2) polemical representations can achieve a dominant position over time, depending on the group's capacity for assertion, negotiation and persistence over time.

***The study of polemical SR from a sociogenetic perspective***. We find that less research examines the process of forming, organizing and reorganizing a representation. Such research, retrospective or in process (as in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic), would allow us to analyse what restructuring can occur in the content of a representation and what factors determine this restructuring. An illustrative example would be the study by C. Mauro and P. Castro (2012) on the SR of biodiversity, one of the few studies describing the trajectory of a SR.

***Study of polemical SR from a longitudinal and cross-sectional perspective***. Research on the evolution and dynamics of a polemical representation over time is needed. Although it is precisely the process of *transformation* that is specific to SR, there are relatively few studies that analyse what happens to a representation over time and how its content changes (*see* e.g. the study by G. Duveen's study on gender SR or, in the local context, M. Sleahtitschi's study on leaders' SR). Similarly, few studies examine the transformations of SR that are not socially accepted, and their dynamics are over time. Most studies limit themselves to investigating the SR of a particular group, over a distinct period, without documenting what happens to this representation over time: does it remain the same – e.g. polemical or emancipative, does its status change? If transformation occurs, under what conditions, over what period and what are the factors producing change?

***Study SR polemics in action***. SR researchers, as V. Eicher *et al.* (2011) point out, need to go beyond a mere description of SR content, trying to explain the origins and the functions that representations have at the societal level. According to J. Jost and G. Ignatow (2001), this could even be a potential direction of SRT development, which would enhance the applicative potential of the theory in the field of community psychology. One of the functions of SR is to guide social behaviours, i.e. SR mobilises towards *action* and can be found, can be decoded, in social *actions* and practices. Therefore, a comprehensive study of SR would include, in addition to the representational process and product, also the *action* – the societal expression of SR.

***Studies on SR and the role of scientific knowledge at the present stage***. The SR study is also about how people understand and integrate the results of scientific knowledge at the level of common sense. Today we could rather speak of a paradox of social knowledge (the specialist without credibility and the knowledgeable non-specialist or self-taught non-specialist). What is the role of scientific knowledge at the present stage? Do people trust the results of science? How are these results integrated at the level of common sense and to what extent do they rely on scientific knowledge in

everyday knowledge? In a context where we seem to witness a process of discreditation of scientific, expert knowledge *(polemical issues)*, these questions could be research directions for further studies.

***The study of SR training in conflict contexts.*** Essential for further studies is to analyse how the dissemination of polemical representations occurs, to identify which psychosocial conditions determine the relatively non-conflictual distribution of representations and, conversely, which amplify their polemical and sensitive character. How can polemic SR be managed at intergroup level in mixed or divided communities, which implicitly also have oppositional representations: e.g., in the RM we could assume the presence of two polemic representations – *orientation towards the EU* and *orientation towards the CIS*, supported, according to opinion polls, by an approximately equal number of people. Continuing with this example, we could presume two polemical SRs (orientation towards the EU and orientation towards the CIS) and an apparently hegemonic one – *"let's get along with everyone"*. The history of the RM after 1991 is a field of confrontations between different representations, a society "divided" by these representations. In the context of Moldova's new status of EU candidate country, the study of the SR of the European integration process must return to the agenda of studies.

**CHAPTER 5, "Polemic representations of the past: between Europeanisation and re-Sovietisation"** (31 p.), presents a case study from the socio-historical field; more specifically, we analyze how ***the past*** is presented as a sensitive object and how polemical SRs are reorganized through hegemonic representations, social and ritual practices. The sensitive and, at the same time, polemical character of the representation of the past, the object of this case study, derives from the content reorganizations (through recollections and re-evaluations of events) and from the political and social oscillations between Europeanisation and re-Sovietisation (through the meanings attributed to Soviet-style celebrations).

The past became a subject of debate at the end of the 1980s, in the context of the rediscovery of a history other than the one propagated by the Soviet authorities. The past is still a subject of debate today – the way various events are being celebrated is an illustrative example. In this study, we have taken two types of events as a basis: in one case, we are talking about events from the recent past that are recalled by people who participated in these events, recounting *lived* experiences through the prism of political and contextual reorganisations; in the second case, we are talking about a perpetuation of practices and meanings attributed to these practices, unrelated to the experience of direct participation in the events that generated them. Summarizing the essential ideas of this analysis, we point out that in the representation of the past there is evidence of the presence of polemic aspects, which can produce and maintain tensions at the intergroup level.

We refer to the way the national movement of the late 1980s is represented, through direct experiences, from the perspective of a "privileged witness" of the events of that time and how those

collective actions are remembered after the event. At the same time, we also analyse the meanings that young people, born after the declaration of independence of the RM, attribute to Soviet-style celebrations. After the disintegration of the USSR, some of the Soviet holidays (e.g. 8 March, 23 February and 9 May) were preserved in the newly formed states and a number of their specific meanings and practices were perpetuated. In other words, in the first case, experience and recollections reorganise representations of the past, in the second, the perpetuation or contestation of certain social practices related to the holidays maintains or reorganises certain meanings of the past. In one case, we are talking about the representation of a recent past, witnessed by the subjects, collective histories and experiences are closely linked to personal ones, in another case, of a past that is more related to the history of the group than to the personal one. Essentially, we describe an ***instrumental case study***, in which we examine the SR implications of the past in the recent history of the RM.

The national revival movement is a social object that expresses a group's belief in ideals and values materialized in celebratory manifestations. We have included these collective actions in the category of *cognitive-affective social objects* (*see* Wolter, 2009/2010). They are social practices that involve both the cognitive dimension (knowledge, information, data) and the affective-experiential dimension (emotional involvement, engagement, participation). With regard to the celebrations, we refer to either a *cognitive-affective object* or a *non-cognitive-affective object.* The past has all the characteristics to be approached as an OR: it is a *polymorphic object;* its interpretation includes different versions and meanings, and it creates tensions and polemics at intergroup level. It has an important *stake* in terms of identity, and at present, the social context does not imply the presence of *controlling instances*.

We will approach representations of the events of 1989 as ***"lived" polemical representations***. In this way, we want to emphasize that representation is a "lived" reality constituted through experience: they are representations formed, articulated, and crystallized, in the context of the direct experience of actors. Consequently, it is "re-lived" through the discourse that subjects produce in interviews or public debates.

The first group we look at, the intellectuals, are active participants in the changes during the *perestroika* period and it was they who were later accused of treason. Analysed through the prism of these evaluations *(approval and blame)*, their actions have the characteristics of a sensitive object. Thus, we wanted to find out how those events are evaluated by those who were at the heart of them, by referring to certain collective and individual experiences, through various connections between representations and affective investments, as well as later developments in the history of the RM. The discourses of the interviewees *(resigned, idealist-romantic* and *militant)* present themselves as contents expressing polemical representations, being dialogically structured, in which the alternative,

perceived representation of the *Other* features in the discourse in a direct or indirect form. The polemic contents in the discourses are also reflected by the two apparently contradictory interpersonal repertoires that go together in the description of the protest: *betrayal – passivity* and *struggle – continuity. The academic discourse* rather expresses typical contents for a hegemonic representation (non-confrontational, consensual aspects).

The dominance of the resignation discourse is the result of the comparison between *"what we wanted, what we expected*" and *"what we achieved"* and as the outcome does not match the expectations and the hopes of the time, the struggle is useless, because the change will not happen anyway (polemical aspects). In the case of the idealist-romantic discourse, the dominant feature of is the emotional dimension, the positive emotions experienced because of collective solidarity. The sense of belonging and benefits of collective participation are frequently invoked. Participants describe themselves as those *"on the streets, melted into the masses marching to a free life"*. The militant interviewees conduct their narratives as an exercise to explain their actions and make them intelligible to those who might not otherwise understand them. At the same time, the discourse seems to be geared towards deconstructing devalued images. The central dimension of this discourse, and by implication the polemical elements, relate to the actions of the time and their outcome, except that, unlike the resignation discourse, the militant discourse focuses on the need to continue the struggle, an unfinished struggle that goes on today. The thematization of the struggle is revealed by the frequency of imperatives such as *"we will fight on", "we will not allow", "we will fight for..."* suggesting action and the need to continue it. Although the time has lessened the fervour of the participants, the position of many remains stable. They speak of an ideal, a higher motivation for the struggle, which still resonates today, given the consistent activity of some of them.

Interlocutors with an academic discourse speak detachedly, sometimes in a didactic, impersonal tone, speaking less of personal experience. They usually make a detailed foray into the history of the events, approaching them in a broader context, compared to the situation in the other former Soviet republics. Historical data, scientific truth, objectivity, fairness and neutrality in dealing with events are the dimensions around which this type of discourse is structured. From this point of view, we consider that their discourse rests on a ***hegemonic representation*** in which consensual, indisputable, and non-conflictual aspects are presented.

For the second group, young people born after 2000, the SR and practices related to the holidays (23 February, 8 March and 9 May) were transmitted through socialisation within significant groups, and the repertoire of representations vary according to family or group experience.

If March 8 seems to have more consensual meanings, accepted and shared at the group level, (*hegemonic representation),* then February 23 and May 9 can be analysed rather as *polemical representations*. However, if February 23 is more about an individual choice, marked in a private

space and therefore less visible at the social level, then May 9 is celebrated in a public space, and the counterpoints of values and meanings attributed to this day are also visible through the related ritual practices (*see* Fig. 3).

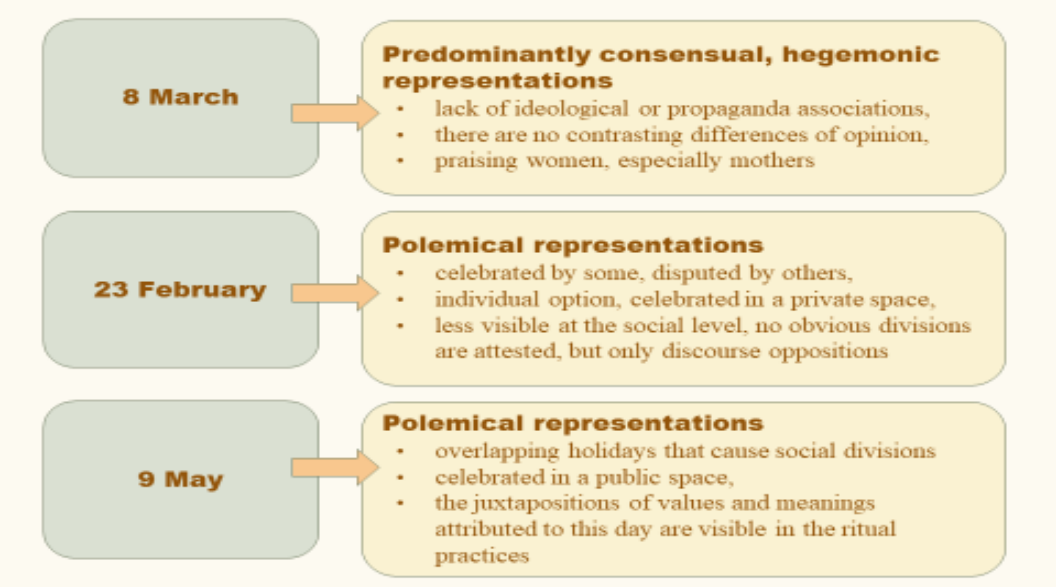



**Figure 3. Meanings attributed to the three holidays**

We note that, over time, ***March 8*** has lost some of its Soviet propaganda significance. The representational content attributed to 8 March is almost homogenous, consensual, associated with the symbol of women, and has become an occasion to praise women or mothers. The holiday is also justified by appeals to universalism and tradition: *'it is an international day'*, *'in all countries we celebrate it'* or *'we have always celebrated it'*. There are no contrasting differences of opinion (polemical content) in the subjects' responses, with the need for the holiday being almost unanimously accepted and even appreciated. From this point of view, we are talking more about a ***hegemonic representation***. The polemical elements result from the commercial character attributed to the holiday and can be explained by the fact that these practices are perpetuated as a result of perceived social pressures and expectations (not to deviate from a unanimously accepted norm). However, these views are in the minority, the hegemonic elements in the SR content being predominant, but could be considered as elements of a polemic representation in the making.

The ***23rd of February***, although celebrated by some, is contested by others, who consider it a holiday unrelated to the history of the country (polemical meanings). The polemic elements relate to the association of the day with the Soviet occupation, being perceived as a "foreign holiday". Those who dispute the significance of the holiday argue in particular that 'Men's Day' is celebrated on another day, 19 November.

***May 9,*** which was marked with much festivity during the Soviet period, is still attributed the same meanings today as it was during the USSR, but with new connotations. These overlapping

meanings intensify the polemic nature of the holiday. While European countries celebrate *Europe Day*, in Eastern Europe 9 May is both *Europe Day* and *Victory Day*. At the same time, *Victory Day* can have a double meaning: commemorating fallen soldiers and glorifying the military victory of May 1945 and the Soviet past.

In recent years, 9 May has also become a *sensitive subject*, generating *controversial* inter-group *representations.* These overlapping celebrations (Victory Day and Europe Day) cause divisions and social polarisation between those who want to celebrate *Victory Day* and those who want *Europe Day to* be celebrated on this day. For some, 9 May means *'liberation'*, it is the symbolic link around which the representation of the glorious Soviet past is built, for others, without denying the historical significance (victory over Nazism), the event is associated with the beginning of the *'Soviet occupation'*, and celebrating it with much pomp would mean for them a recognition of this occupation. Both interpretations present an arsenal of rival meanings: Soviet heritage and pro-European orientation. One associated with the past and the other associated with the present and the country's new geopolitical orientation. For some, 9 May is an occasion to celebrate victory, evoke the glorious past and validate the sacrifice of the fallen. For others, it is associated more with the beginning of an occupation and the price of victory that was achieved with much sacrifice and loss. Another contentious aspect of the holiday is the St George ribbon, now associated with the war in Ukraine.

The coexistence of conflicting, polemical antinomies at the representational level is attested: Victory Day *versus* Europe Day, victory *versus* occupation, mourning *versus* festivism, occupation *versus* independence, etc. In this sense, the statement of a participant is eloquent for this type of representational duality: *"Victory Day has nothing to do with me, and Europe Day is at a distance"*. This kind of indecision or neutral attachment to these two meanings of the holiday indicates that the representation of the "new holiday" (Europe Day) is still in the making, and the relevance of the previous one, associated with the Soviet period (USSR Victory Day in WWII), is still predominant. The aim of celebrating Europe Day on 9 May is to counter inter-group rivalries and hostilities and to create a common project (European integration), a superordinate goal for states that were in antagonistic relations during the war. The "winners and losers" contrasts maintain tensions at the level of the groups.

To better understand the impact of representations on intergroup relations, researchers need to examine how SR of history are used, focusing on *'history in action'*. Conflicting representations of the past demonstrate that there is no neutral view; the recollection is always made from the perspective of a particular social category and according to the specifics of the socio-cultural context. There is no impartial and definitive interpretation of the past, rather we identify diverse and even antagonistic

ways of looking at the past, articulated according to the diversity of groups in a particular social context.

Understanding the SRs that different groups have on history is crucial to the process of inter-group reconciliation. It is important for groups to reflect on how they represent their past. Decontextualising historical narratives and a critical view in teaching history would be a first step that would encourage dialogue between groups, several studies state. The teaching of history, the construction of monuments or collective rituals must be carried out in such a way as to open dialogue between different versions of the past. The way historical events are remembered can create controversy even long after they have occurred: attempts to 'erase' or 'rewrite' events in group history can increase inter-group tensions. Lavish reminiscences, but also the abuse of guilt-tripping can provoke reactions of identity protection, justification and often rejection of guilt.

**CHAPTER 6, "Polemic representations of collective protests: antinomic tendencies and parallel value referential"** (38 p.), presents a case study from the sociopolitical field, through which we examined how ***collective protest*** manifests itself as a sensitive object and how this social object generates polemic representations, as a result of ritual practices, oppositional tendencies and parallel value referential at the intergroup level. According to the same analytical scheme, we argue how collective protest becomes a sensitive object and, respectively, how this social object shapes the SRs of collective protests from 1989-2009. In this case, we speak rather of a contested and re-negotiated representation.

Although collective actions were a common practice during the Soviet period (parades, rallies and demonstrations were frequently organised), in the context of new social changes, the meaning attributed to them changed from ***praising*** the power and the communist party (hegemonic representation) to ***opposing*** the regime (polemical representation). In other words, although we are talking about a common social practice, new meanings are given to it, which clearly differentiates it from the collective actions of the Soviet period. The demonstration or rally is no longer a source of acclaim and consolidation of power but, on the contrary, a means of opposition and resistance to it.

In the post-Soviet space, collective protest as a new social practice of political participation and a means of influencing political decisions was discovered during *perestroika*. In the context of that reform, through *glasnost*, Soviet citizens were given opportunities to express their views and thus participate in the process of restructuring socialist society. A less expected effect was that the long-camouflaged national problems began to be widely discussed in the press at the time, and then the masses took to the streets.

The collective transformations of the restructuring period occurred in several stages. First, the awareness of freedom of opinion: *"it was something new"*, *"we were happy to be able to speak, to express our opinions, we listened spellbound to Gorbachev"*. Then awareness of the extent of

deprivation (violation of individual freedoms in Soviet society): *"someone gave us the Declaration of Human Rights and we read it, but secretly, there was a danger of being expelled*. In the following period, collective actions diversified and took on considerable proportions.

The expansion of the register of participatory forms (rallies, demonstrations, national assemblies, etc.) has also triggered a process of representational elaboration, the construction of representation being justified by and through participation in these collective actions. These key sequences in the evolution of collective actions also produce a series of ***changes and counterpoints of meanings*** that enhance the sensitive nature of this OR, generating polemical representations for different social groups. The polemical nature of the representation is also marked by the fact that collective actions, although significant for the participants (associations with democratic and national values), are perceived as threatening for others (associations with nationalism, extremism and anti-Sovietism).

The genesis of representation takes place in a context that, although in a process of change, still preserves the ideological characteristics of the past at the level of discourses and social practices (Cojocaru, 2006a; 2012a; 2018; 2020c). At the beginning of the *perestroika* period, the official discourse, even if it was oriented towards change, thematized this change through a wooden language typical of the Soviet period. Thus, the representation of the restructuring process, which was in the process of formation, could not be in contradiction with the ***hegemonic*** one at that time (the representation of the organisation and functioning of socialist society). The conflict escalated when identity issues and independence from the USSR began to be discussed in the former Soviet republics.

This representation of social change, which at first seemed to be ***emancipative*** in relation to the hegemonic one (therefore not in conflict with it, being just another version of socialist society), takes on sensitive aspects, becoming ***polemical***. From this point of view, it no longer fitted in with the hegemonic representation; moreover, it began to place itself in opposition to it, and was subsequently completely rejected by official discourse (e.g., in the communist press, those who demanded national demands were called *"nationalists"*, even *"fascists", and* the street demonstrations they organised were labelled *"extremist"*, which was in clear contradiction with what the demonstrators called *"freedom", "democracy"* or *"national values"*). Protest action cannot be part of democratic conventions if it is *nationalist*.

In this way, Soviet citizens are conveyed ***two opposing messages of representation***, which in the collective imagination are mutually exclusive: 'social change in the context of socialist ideology, without deviation from it' and 'social change in the context of national values, which presupposes a course other than that accepted by the dominant ideology'. Participants in collective action had a choice between these two options: either to substitute a hegemonic (dominant) representation of the

time - *socialist internationalism* - or to align themselves with its elements, seeking justification based on socialist principles.

Recurrent forms of protest in the recent history of the Republic of Moldova and the similarities that characterize them speak of sensitive issues that have not been fully clarified: the unfinished "dossier" of 1991, identity tribulations, political transformations and geopolitical oscillations are causing the masses to return to the streets, maintaining a constant conflict. After the large-scale protests of 1995 and 2002-2003, when the potential for protest seemed to be no longer on such a scale, the masses came out to protest again in 2009, this time the protesters being dominated by the frustration generated by the results of an election that would have consolidated for a long time a social state that could no longer be tolerated. Based on an analysis of collective protests (1988-2009) with certain common characteristics, we examined how the SR content of collective protests is organised and negotiated ***(multiple case study)***.

In order to analyse the specificity of the object of representation, we differentiated two categories of protesters: relatively permanent participants in protest actions (militants) and participants without experience of previous protests or occasional ones (neophytes). Respectively, for the first category of participants the "collective protest" is a *cognitive* social object (frequent participation and repetition of the practice of protest makes it a familiar and experientially familiar object, which even becomes an integral part of their identity). For the second category, it would be more of a *non-cognitive* social object (although they have fewer experiences of participation, therefore the practice of collective protest is less familiar and familiar, they might still have a theoretical-abstract or indirect knowledge, through second-hand experiences). But essentially, for both categories of protesters the *affective* dimension is central. We refer to a lived experience, the emotions felt by the participants being an essential factor in mobilising and coalescing around a common belief.

The collective protest is a ***polymorphic object***, meaning that different facets and versions can be identified in its interpretation, it is represented by a series of opposing meanings (group of participants and opposition groups), which amplifies its sensitive nature and creates tensions and polemics at intergroup level. It has an important stake in terms of identity - it is evocative for demonstrators and threatening for opponents. The social context implies the limited presence of controlling instances, whose influence diminishes in intensity as the number of participants increases (crowds become a perceptual datum that can no longer be ignored), including the presence of alternative sources of information that cannot be totally controlled by power (e.g. during the 2009 protests, even though some TV channels were under the control of the dominant group, there were multiple alternative sources of information, including online).

Three essential elements are signalled in the SR construction of protest, implicitly three registers of interpretation: 1) ***the reorganisation of SR*** - mutations in the meaning attributed to the demonstration in the Soviet period, it is no longer meant to praise power, but, on the contrary, opposes it; 2) ***the negotiation of SR*** - generated by the presence of antinomic tendencies and counterpoints of meanings and 3) ***the contestation of SR*** - the transfer of meanings from the representation of nationalism to the representation of protest, which, by comparison, receives the characteristics of that category (*see* Fig. 4).

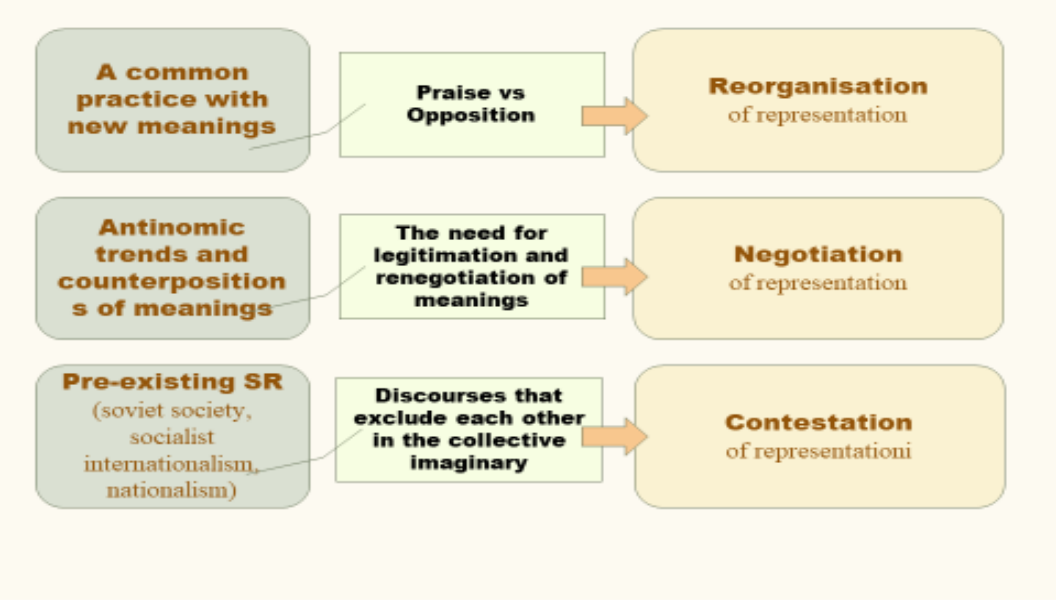



**Figure 4. Changes and contrasting meanings in the SR of protest**

It can be assumed that the collective actions after the declaration of the independence of the Republic of Moldova also had an identity-related tinge, being related to the perception of the decadence of a national movement, of some betrayed ideals, a kind of reaction to a perpetual identity threat. Starting from this observation, through this case study we aimed to identify certain similarities between various protest actions from 1988-2009, in terms of symbolic relations and expressive ritual practices that structure the universe of mobilization, but also the process of elaboration and reorganisation of representation, while analysing the impact they exert on intergroup relations.

Examining various collective actions from 1988-2009, with certain common features, I looked at how they were covered in the press at the time, including the behaviour of the actors involved in the actions and what were the polemical representations "transmitted" through the media. In this case study, I have limited my analysis to a comprehensive description of four protest events: the protest actions against the communist government in April 2009; the protest actions against federalisation in 2003; the student and intellectual protests in 1995; and the protest actions against the Moscow putsch in August 1991.

Collective protests are distinguished by regularities of manifestation and by certain thematic affinities: they trigger the same *themata* and are provoked by the same *nexuses*. The main *nexus* of the 2003 protests was the territory, aimed at preventing the federalisation of the Republic of Moldova. The 2009 protest event is reminiscent of the November 2003 protests and the August 1991 protests. The main *themata* of these protests was freedom-oppression. In 1991, the actions of the coup perpetrators were perceived as a threat to the democracy and sovereignty of the Soviet republics. Similarly, in 2003, the federalisation project (the Kozak plan) was perceived as a threat to freedom and territorial integrity. The 1995 protests were reminiscent of 1989 and the achievements of that year - language, alphabet, history.

Through a content analysis of the print media from the period of restructuring (the early stage in the construction of representation, 1985-1989), I aimed to identify the forms of communication and the way in which the SRs were structured that gave rise to the communication relations between those who control the symbolic universe and the consumers of this information (Moscovici, 1961/1976 *apud* Curelaru, 2006). In this sense, I have presented a general picture of the media context that precedes the emergence of protest events (*see* Fig. 5) and, at the same time, I have analysed how new forms of ***participatory communication*** take shape: indirect (through the media) and direct (in meetings, rallies and demonstrations).

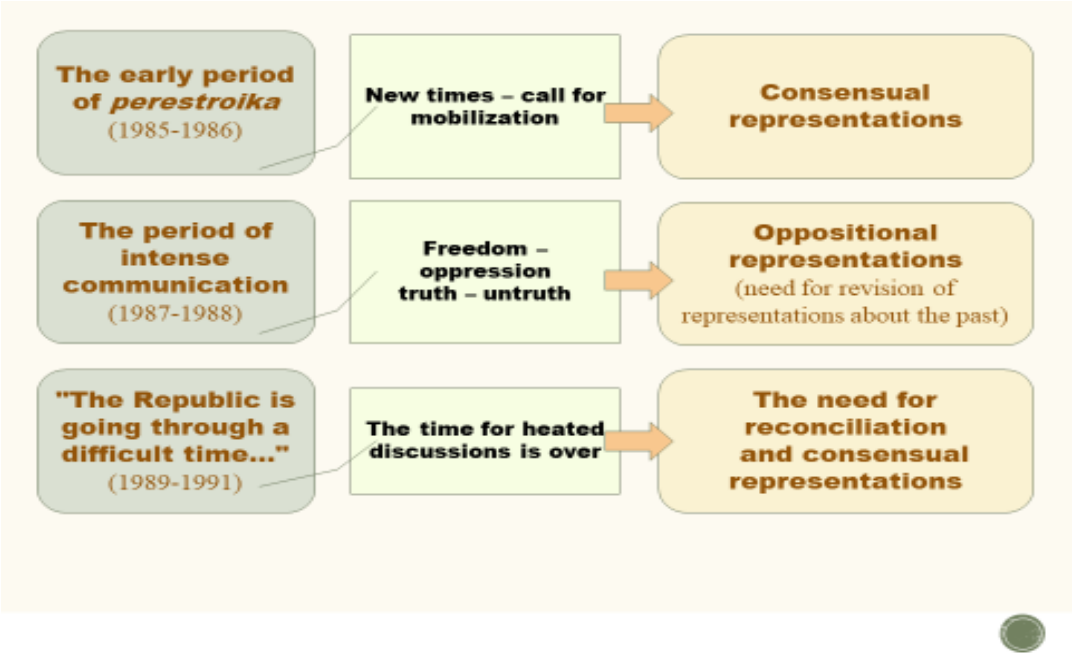



**Figure 5. Forms of communication and representations during restructuring**

The study of this ***medium of representational elaboration*** allowed us to grasp how these contradictory tendencies in representational contents were triggered, as well as the evolution of intergroup relations and attitudes. In media discourse, dilemmas and nexuses are outlined in several central *themata*: *new times - mobilization for change; freedom - oppression* and *truth - untruth*...

In the former MSSR, the representation of protest is built from antagonistic positions. Protest, significant for one social group, is perceived as threatening for other social groups and thus becomes a source of conflict and contradictory positions. The problematisation and intensification of discussions with reference to identity, language and history places discourses in two parallel universes, the relative consensus and enthusiasm of the early period of restructuring, which created the premises for *participatory communication,* are subsequently disrupted by *conflictual communication* generated by opposing attitudinal positions ('the republic is going through a difficult period').

The media representation of the events of August 1991 is built around an evaluative discourse (negative or positive) on the Moscow putsch and a mobilizing discourse - *supportive,* by expressing support for the actions of the putschists or *opposition,* by calling for resistance and civil disobedience. In the case of the 1995 collective actions, the media discourse focuses on two basic elements: *threat* and *hope.* The reflection of the event is produced by reference to the events of 1989. From this point of view, two opposing polemic discourses stand out: a *mobilising-militant discourse* (Ț), in which the event is evoked as a new stage in the national rebirth, emphasising its ongoing nature, and a *critical-alarming discourse* (PO), in which the event is reflected as a real threat to the stability and integrity of the republic. The same media polarisation can be observed in the case of the 2003 protests. The discourse is marked by two opposing tendencies: a discourse praising the federalisation plan (in the Russian-language press) and criticising it (in the Romanian-language press) and the reversal of these tendencies after the refusal to sign the memorandum, praising the protests in the Romanian-language press and criticising them in the Russian-language press.

The polarisation of the media is also noticeable in the case of the 2009 protests, also known as the "Twitter Revolution", because young people were mobilised via mobile phones and social networks (facebook, twitter, messenger). Subsequently, some TV stations were blamed for reporting the protests sporadically, piecemeal, highlighting more the consequences of the violent actions on 7 April. The totality of the events of 6-12 April unfolded according to a specific narrative pattern: exposition, plot, unfolding, climax and denouement. The peaceful protest, more *expressive* than *instrumental*, degenerated into mass rebellion. At first a symbolic, non-instrumental action, the youth protest, materialised in a funeral ceremony, whereby the disgruntled were summoned to the streets with a candle in hand to attest to national mourning, took on unexpected proportions on the second day. Peaceful demonstrations culminated in violence (climax) and reprisals against young people (denouement).

In the protests I analysed, participants resort to certain rituals that give meaning to their action. Frequently, the actual message of the protests is directly linked to the Christian religion indicating a collaboration between the two instances: political and religious. In this way, the gestures of the

protesters carry a double meaning: political and religious, since, in addition to the secular practices specific to the protest scenario, the participants perform rituals of religious significance.

Protest is a form of political participation. In this way, people express their dissatisfaction or indignation with certain government decisions. They believe in what they are doing, and their participation is voluntary. And they do so out of a natural impulse, a belief or an inner motive. The polemical aspects of the representation of protest relate to the perception of failure, the futility of some actions and suspicions of bribery of some participants. At the same time, polemical aspects are also determined by inter-group relations. We are witnessing simultaneous actions - protest and counter-protest: it is not only a protest against the government, but also against opposition groups, generating conflictual relations linked to opposing value referents, etc. Currently, we could also admit a certain risk of devaluing the practice of protest as a form of political participation and the likelihood of diminishing the potential for mobilisation, determined by certain polemical aspects in the representation of protest (bribery of some participants, lack of visible results, etc.).

**CHAPTER 7, "Controversial Representations of a Pandemic: Medical Contradictions, Religious Controversies and Social Controversies"** (43 p.), presents a case study from the socio-medical field, in which we examine how the ***COVID-19 pandemic*** manifests itself as a sensitive object and how this OR generates controversial representations, given the medical, religious and social controversies that have existed in society, including the implications of these controversies at the intergroup level. The pandemic offered us a rare opportunity to examine how a OR is articulated in the social imaginary, how the dynamics of an OR under construction, in the process of elaboration, occur. The case presents a challenge to scholarship in the field precisely because it illustrates the trajectory of an SR in the making.

According to the proposed scheme, I present a series of arguments by which we want to explain why, in our view, the pandemic is a sensitive object and how this has affected a representation in germene. Since we are referring to a SR in the process of formation, I have analysed relevant aspects in the process of *anchoring* and *objectification* (pre-existing contents, meanings attributed to new social practices and implications of these practices at the intergroup level), while referring to two distinct stages in the formation of this representation.

The rapidity with which the pandemic crisis evolved, but also living it "here" and "now" as a personal experience, offers, on the one hand, the possibility of observing a rare phenomenon that occurs at the very moment of analysis (from this point of view, it is an ***intrinsic case study***), but also, on the other hand, the need for continuous, daily reassessments of ideas and conclusions about the crisis. In this sense, researchers have the 'privilege' of an active-participatory observer: of analysing a phenomenon *in situ,* in full swing, with first-hand information, 'lived' experiences, etc. It is one of the rare situations, write J. Jetten *et al.* (2020), when we are not only researchers but also participants.

According to W. Wolter's (2009/2010) typology, the pandemic can be considered a ***non-cognitive*** social object (although there is a flood of information, news and debate about the pandemic, this does not produce clarity in the process of organising SR, but, on the contrary, seems to cause even more uncertainty) and ***affective*** (the affective impact is strong, the fear of illness and death persists).

In terms of type of representation, according to S. Moscovici's (1988) classification, the SR of the COVID-19 pandemic presents itself as a ***polemical representation***, given the social, religious and medical controversies with reference to COVID-19 and their intergroup impact. The polemical nature of the discussion of the pandemic is also intensified by the spread of conspiracy beliefs. COVID-19 has all the typical characteristics of a phenomenon that can give rise to conspiracy theories: it generates fear, is difficult to understand, has complex causes and involves government actions that curtail individual freedoms (Dubey *et al.*, 2020).

Three new social practices that we consider defining in the construction of the representation of the pandemic, implicit with intra- and inter-group effects would be: 1) ***wearing the mask***, 2) ***physical distancing*** and 3) ***social isolation***. All three, however, seem to be integrated with difficulty by the population into the existing system of social practices. While in some cases, the failure to comply with them could be explained by ignorance, in others, explanations must also be sought in the representations we have of others, of ourselves in relation to others, of the social support offered to people at risk (the elderly, the disabled, the mentally ill, etc.). One possible explanation is that while authorities and doctors recommend them as measures to protect each other and others in the community, people may perceive them as forms of stigmatisation, marginalisation or disrespect towards others. In everyday perception we are more likely to shy away from those who are "plague". Thus, in the context of the pandemic, *SR about others* ("the other may be infected, they present a danger"), *us in relation to others* ("respect physical distance from others"; "avoid social contacts and crowds of people") and *social support* for vulnerable groups ("don't visit the elderly") are affected.

We distinguish two stages in the SR construction of the COVID-19 disease: a) the construction of representation with and through the media (early period of the pandemic: fewer cases, less visibility, experience and direct knowledge, the contents about COVID-19 being mainly media constructions); b) the construction of representation with and through direct experience (as the incidence of cases increased, the degree of exposure and visibility in relation to them increased, i.e. the contents about COVID-19 are already passed through the filter of direct, experiential, lived knowledge). It seems that, at least at an early stage, the *SR of the COVID-19 pandemic* is constructed on the basis of predominantly negative cognitions that generate prejudices and behaviours of avoidance of *the Other*, perceived as a danger. In the second stage, some statements expressing attitudes of closeness and empathy towards the *Other* are noted, given the common experiences that

lead to a greater understanding of the disease. Therefore, the availability of cases also generates changes in the SR content.

In this way, the empirical research for this case study aims precisely at these stages: 1) content analysis of media texts (indirect knowledge: period of analysis 11.03.2020 - 15.05.2020, from the announcement of the first case in the RM and the WHO declaration of the pandemic until the end of the isolation) and 2) discursive analysis of narratives about the experience of the disease (direct knowledge: in-depth interviews with people who have been infected with SARS-CoV-2).

As this is an unknown phenomenon, we have highlighted some questions that people are trying to find an answer to: what is COVID-19; what is happening and how do others experience the disease and the pandemic; what should and should not be done and what will happen next? At the same time, we have identified three sources of knowledge (cognitive polyphony) that have the role of elaborating meanings in relation to COVID-19, implicitly, answers to these questions: *common knowledge* (narratives, testimonies, direct or indirect experiences); *medical knowledge* (specialist: WHO, doctors, researchers) and *religious knowledge* (meanings from a religious perspective) (*see* Fig. 6).

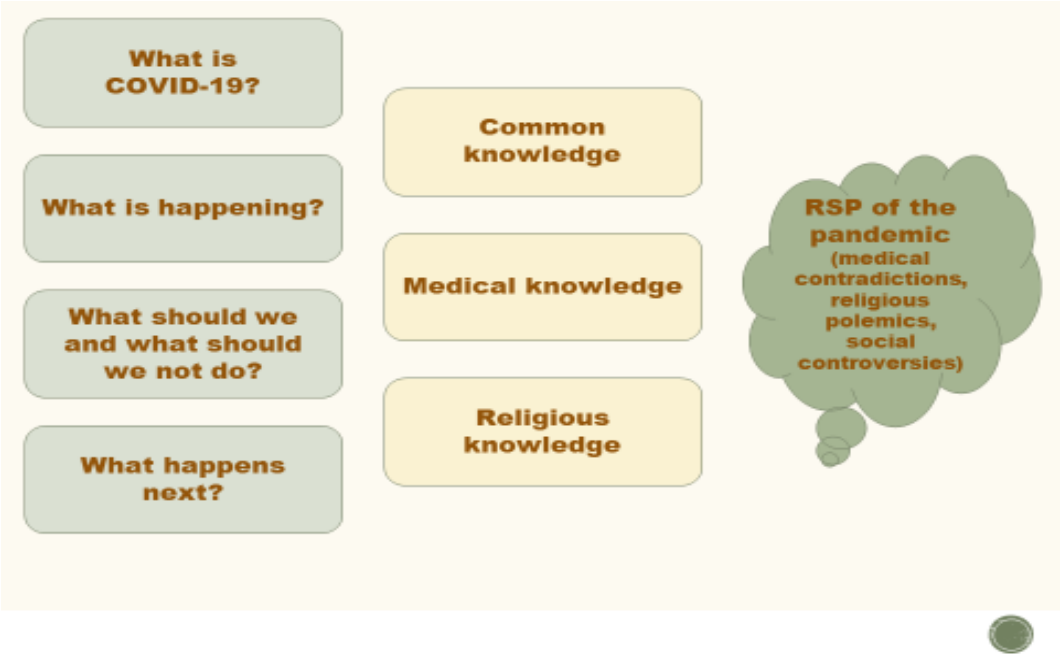



**Figure 6. Knowledge sources, categories and contents media representational** (March-May 2020)

In the media analysis, three major themes were addressed, which basically explain the dynamics of the representational process: a) what is COVID-19? b) what is happening now, in Moldova and globally? and c) what will happen next? Most of the texts refer to the "what is happening now" stage, as they reflect the day-to-day experience, the crisis being lived "here and now", in full evolution. Another dynamic we considered was according to the period: March, the *beginning*, with little information and a lot of unknowns; April, the *peak*, with an increasing number of cases, including community transmission, which made COVID-19 a common experience; and May, with

the *first attempts at normalisation*, when there was talk of loosening some restrictions and coming out of isolation.

At the onset of the pandemic, in media reports, COVID-19 is frequently linked to other accessible and familiar socio-cultural phenomena (the *anchoring* process): e.g. SARS-CoV-2 is compared to HIV, which causes AIDS. In describing the pandemic, visual images and linguistic codes are used to make it more tangible in the collective imagination (the *objectification* process): e.g. metaphors specific to the representation of war: 'fight', battle', 'defence', which justify the mobilisation to fight the invisible 'enemy' COVID-19. At the same time, there is also mention of certain risks to which employees who have frequent contact with *others*, which is difficult to avoid (e.g. doctors, taxi drivers or policemen), and of various prosocial behaviours (mutual aid, donations or messages of gratitude to "angels in white coats", etc.). We note fewer texts referring to positive effects and post-pandemic scenarios (the level of uncertainty being far too high at this time).

In April, the incidence of community-transmitted cases increases, and so does the number of media reports on the number of sick people, deaths or people treated. The first mandatory face mask requirements are introduced in several countries around the world. What was at first only a recommended behaviour becomes a mandatory behaviour, punishable by sanctions if it is violated. By the end of April, the first "protests" were already visible, the tendency to deny the seriousness of the situation was growing, pandemic fatigue and the desire to return to normality began to set in. Although people begin to 'learn' to live with the 'normality' of the pandemic, they want fewer restrictions. In contrast to March, there are more texts about the symptoms of the disease, but also about future scenarios.

Since May, even though there are still warnings about the risks of illness, the first attempts are being made to return to "the old normal". During this period, there are discussions or even attempts to gradually relax certain restrictions, people are allowed to go for walks in the parks, some categories of civil servants return to work, the military leave and some localities come out of quarantine, etc. From this period onwards, *fear normalises*, it becomes a normality, a natural part of everyday life. The infection curve has risen to over 100, and the high number of cases no longer causes amazement among the population. The high number of infections is becoming *commonplace*.

Direct experiences are associated with changes at the perceptual level, which bring with them changes in the SR content of the pandemic, the way of relating to life and to others. The visibility of cases diminishes some of the prejudices associated with the disease and the sick, as the incidence of cases increases, people understand that no one is saved and therefore "COVID-19 cannot be considered a shameful disease", associated with irresponsibility, as was the case in the early period of the pandemic, that anyone can get infected, therefore compassion and understanding is needed. According to the analysis grid, the subjects' narratives were examined considering the following

categories: a) perceptions and reactions to the diagnosis; b) experience of the disease and changes that occurred; c) perceptions and meanings of the COVID-19 pandemic; and d) reintegration into the work process. Respectively, according to the perception of predictability of diagnosis and control in the management of the disease, we identified two discursive categories (predictable diagnosis *versus* unpredictable diagnosis), which are folded into two scenarios of the situation (typical scenario *versus* atypical scenario) (*see* Fig. 7).

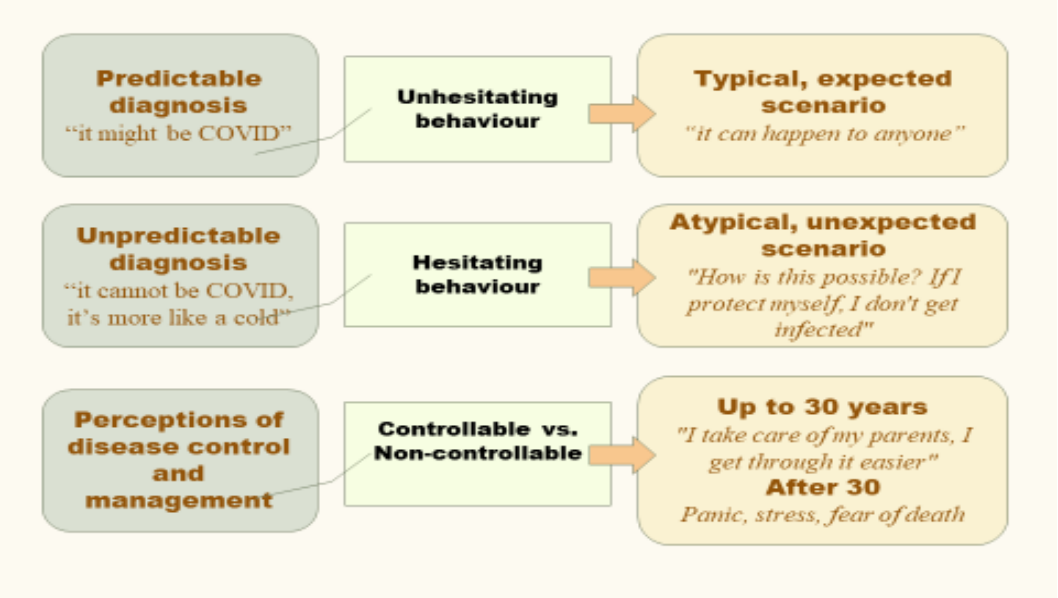



**Figure 7. Representation as an experiential construct**

We have discussed in this chapter the emergence of representation, with the pandemic providing this opportunity to observe the development of representation. Finally, it raises the question: how has the process of constructing SR evolved? If at the beginning of the pandemic crisis and during 2020, ***polemic contents*** were mainly identified in the SR of the COVID-19 disease (Cojocaru, 2020a; 2020b and others), later on, a certain consensus (in the position of the church, doctors and other stakeholders) is attested. We note that while initially the seriousness of the crisis or the likelihood of contamination could be denied, later the need for vaccination was rejected (another *polemical content*).

Although the pandemic crisis is over, a number of questions remain unanswered (*the controversial content* - the origin of the virus, the severity of the disease or the need for vaccination - remains *controversial*). Concern about the pandemic and the process of building a consensual representation were "overshadowed" by the threat of war. The pandemic takes a back seat as soon as the Russian Federation launches a military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. One threat has been lightning-quickly replaced by another - that of real war in the immediate vicinity and a possible military attack. The war came as unpredictable as the pandemic and just as the pandemic is extremely

threatening. As with the pandemic, another defining note is the perplexity of the situation: most people said to themselves: we did not think this could happen. (*see* Fig. 8).

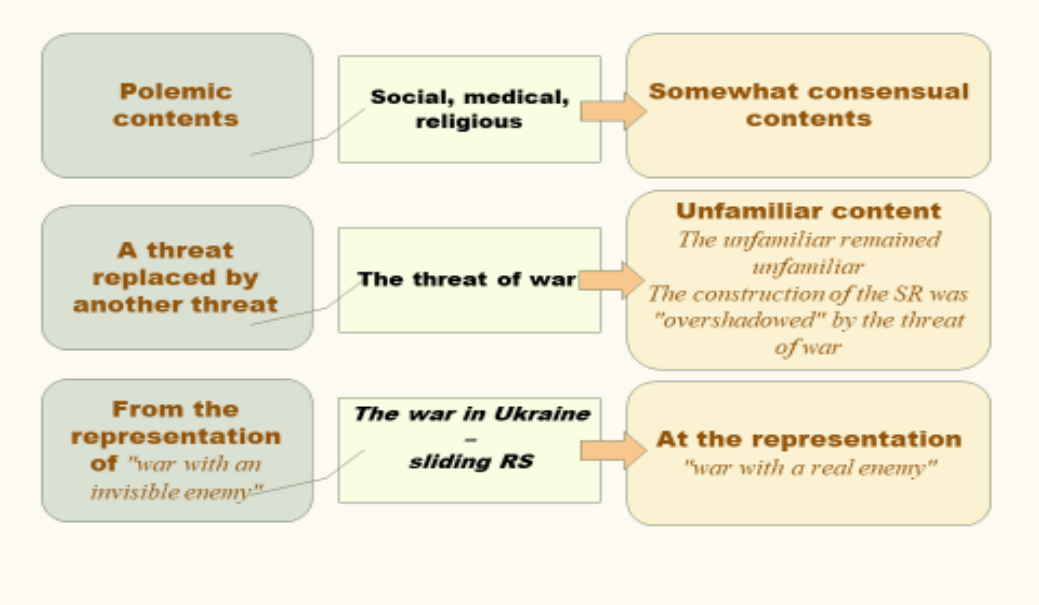



**Figure 8. Pandemic is over: trajectories of social representation**

From a simple metaphor with reference to the pandemic, present in the media discourse, war is transformed into a concrete representation, derived from the proximity of an immediate reality. From a war with 'an invisible enemy' we are witnessing a war with 'a real enemy'. From an abstract object of representation, *war* becomes a concrete object of representation, starting from a reality that can be observed in real terms and even experienced in the most tragic way. In this way, war is not simply a media construct associated with the management of the pandemic crisis, war becomes a real experience. There is a shift from an abstract representation of war ('fighting an invisible enemy') to a concrete representation ('fighting a real enemy').

Studies show that the psychosocial dimension is extremely important in pandemic crisis management, and knowledge of the SR provides an opportunity to understand what meanings are attributed to the pandemic and what social behaviour individuals adopt or will adopt in the future. The crisis is undoubtedly a matter of collective psychology. This is important not only in the context of the crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic, but also with reference to other epidemics or outbreaks.

Government action in managing the crisis requires a focus on collective, not just individual, strategies. Just as leaders are role models in crisis situations, they must behave as 'prototypical members', demonstrating themselves the behaviour they demand from the population. In a crisis situation in general, and in a pandemic crisis in particular, it is important that people receive as much information as possible from informed sources, so as to avoid spreading rumours that could further increase uncertainty and panic in the face of 'unknown danger'.

At the same time, crisis management measures must be framed in a register that allows for the internalisation of individual experiences, whether directly or indirectly experienced. In the media, it is necessary to present as many particular cases as possible, individual experiences, which will make it easier to pass them on as subjective experiences. Inducing the threat through the message can only have the desired effect if a certain level is not exceeded. Studies show that acute anxiety-inducing messages usually do not lead to major attitudinal changes; very intense emotional reactions can diminish the ability of individuals to pay attention to arguments/doubts. Feeling very threatened, as fear increases in intensity, avoidance or denial reactions may occur. People refuse to believe that this is true for them or resign themselves to a perceived fateful reality.

## GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Scientific direction and scientific results of the work.** In this paper, we aimed to make some contributions to the development of a new scientific direction in the study of SR, namely: the narrative perspective in the study of sensitive objects and polemical representations. Correlated with the aims and objectives indicated in the introduction of the paper, we present below the scientific results that have led to the development of this scientific direction (see R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7).

### R1 - Current developments and trends in SR studies

Current developments and trends in the study of SR have been identified, which has allowed the clarification of some research directions that are being debated at the present stage, with a view to concretizing the thematic framework that requires extensive explorations in the field, both for the present research ("implications of sensitive objects and polemical representations on intergroup relations") and for further studies by interested researchers (*see* **O1, ch. 1,** Cojocaru, 2016b, 2018, 2022a, 2022c etc.).

### R2 - theoretical and methodological principles in the study of SR

Theoretical and methodological principles in the study of SR were clarified, which allowed the development of a theoretical-reflexive model illustrating how sensitive objects and polemical representations are related in an intergroup context marked by social divergence and opposition, in order to apply this model to the study of SR generated by conflictual relational dynamics (*see* O2, ch. 2, Cojocaru, 2010a, 2015, 2018, 2021a etc.).

### R3 - characteristics of sensitive objects, normative-ethical dilemmas and affective-cognitive implications in the study of sensitive objects

Characteristics of sensitive objects, normative-ethics dilemmas and their affective-cognitive implications were examined, which allowed to identify the impact that the researcher can have on the discursive productions of the subjects, in view of the awareness of the affective implications of the interaction and the ethical dilemmas that arise during the study (*see.* O3, chap. 3, Cojocaru, 2011b, 2012a, 2014, 2015, 2016b, 2017, 2018, 2021b, 2022b, 2022e, etc.).

### R4 - stages in the evolution of studies on polemical representations, characteristics of polemical representations

Meta-analytical syntheses on the concept of "polemical representation" have been developed from the time of its emergence (1988) to the present, which has allowed us to identify stages in the evolution of studies on this type of representation, characteristics and specific themes of these representations, with a view to clarifying potential directions of study for the future (*see* O4, ch. 4, Cojocaru, 2018, 2022a, 2022c etc.).

### R5 - the process of elaborating polemical representations according to sensitive objects

By means of case studies, various events in the recent history of the Republic of Moldova that present themselves as controversial subjects were analysed, which allowed clarifying the implications that sensitive objects produce in the emergence of polemical representations (*see* O5, ch. 5-7, Cojocaru, 2016b, 2017, 2018, 2022b, etc.).

### R6 - the process of elaborating polemical representations according to context, social practices and dynamics of intergroup relations

At the same time, the analysis of these case studies allowed the identification of the implications of the context, social practices and dynamics of intergroup relations, in order to clarify the process of elaboration of polemical

representations (*see*. O6, ch. 5-7; Cojocaru, 2009, 2010b, 2011a, 2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2018, 2020a, 2020c, 2022d, Cojocaru and Zara, 2022a and others).

**R7 - assumptions about potential psychosocial trajectories in the evolution of polemical representations**

The analysis of the case studies also allowed us to admit potential psychosocial trajectories in the evolution and dynamics of these representations (*see* **O7, ch. 5-7;** Cojocaru, 2018, 2022a, 2022c and others).

***Personal contributions*: theoretical value of the work.** First, this paper has identified current trends in the study of SR and the main research directions that need extensive exploration, find reviewed the classification of SR, and the theoretical debates related to this classification. Secondly, we aimed to provide some conceptualizations for sensitive objects and polemical representations, including highlighting specific peculiarities in their study. Thus, the defining features and notes of sensitive objects, normative-ethical dilemmas and cognitive-affective implications in their approach were analysed. The analysis of studies on polemical representations (1988-2022) allowed the elaboration of meta-analytical syntheses, outlining recent developments and issues in the study of polemical representations, including their characteristics. Based on these analyses, the trajectories of this type of representation at the societal and inter-group levels and further directions of study were also suggested.

***Personal contributions:* methodological value of the work.** The paper presents preliminary notes in the initiation of a study that addresses SR, in particular SR that presents itself as polemical representations, outlining a model of preliminary assertions, research directions and methodological principles that basically concretize the attempt to answer a series of questions: ***how to*** articulate SR in a reflexive framework that initiates the investigative process; ***how to*** shape SR as a *process* and as a *product* in a given intergroup social context; and ***how to*** carry out the investigative process in order to decode the interactions emerging in the dynamics of this representation.

***Personal contributions:* the applied value of the work.** The paper is primarily addressed to *the academic community* (students, teachers, researchers), presenting (1) a complex study on the genesis of polemical representations and the implications of sensitive objects in their dynamics and evolution, while (2) also containing issues related to the specifics of sensitive research and the role of the researcher in ensuring the authenticity of the discursive productions of subjects in such research. We believe that (3) the theoretical-reflexive model proposed in this thesis can be used as a framework for the analysis of a SR at the beginning of its research. Respectively, we express our confidence that the paper will also be of interest to *practitioners* (counsellors, decision-makers, psychologists) in order to better understand how intergroup relational dynamics work in terms of the attitudes and behaviour that groups adopt in situations of social controversy and conflict. *The general public*, interested in the issue of inter-group relations, will be provided with various empirical illustrations on the subject (based on studies carried out in various countries or by the author).

**Impact of the results on the development of science, economy and education**

The paper reviews current trends in the study of SR and identifies key research directions that require extensive exploration. Special attention is devoted to the SR classification proposed by S. Moscovici (1988), and the theoretical debates related to this classification are examined. At the same time, we propose a meta-analytical study on the evolution of research (1988-2022) with reference to one of the types presented in this classification – ***polemical representations***, analysing recent issues in the study of polemical representations and the trajectories that this type of SR entails at the social and intergroup levels. In this sense, this analysis contributes to a better understanding of the concept of *"polemical representation"*, providing support for further studies.

In the paper, I also analyse the concept of the ***sensitive object***, highlighting defining characteristics and notes. By examining various 'histories of research', reflections on the investigative journey, it has been theoretically suggested and empirically proven that ORs exhibit some distinct characteristics depending on their type. Therefore, we want to emphasize that the investigation of a SR must start not only by analysing the specificity of the object of representation, but also its type, including the distinctive aspects that communication with reference to the social object entails in the context of intergroup dynamics (for a better understanding of how the emergence and articulation of a SR occurs in various social contexts and interactions). A ***classification of social objects of representation*** has also been proposed, which we consider useful in grounding the reflexive framework that starts the investigative process.

Similarly, this thesis provides contributions on the ***theoretical conceptualization of*** the ***interrelationship*** – ***sensitive objects and polemical representations***. To illustrate, some events in the recent history of the RM have been analysed, which present themselves as controversial topics, generating social dynamics and polarized discourses and which can be approached as sensitive objects, highlighting, at the same time, the way in which polemical representations are shaped according to these objects of representation. In the same vein, we have also tried to elucidate the route that polemical representations follow. In this way, we wanted to contribute to the refinement of the theoretical analysis of the OR issue in general and with reference to the concepts of *sensitive objects* and polemical *representation* in particular.

**Limitations/ unresolved issues** (in this thesis)

***1. Sensitive objects***. Although I have not focused much on this aspect, one finding that emerges from this analysis and which requires further study is the difference between sensitive objects of representation (which are or become "sensitive" in social interactions, in the sense that they include non-expressible contents and thereby create inter-group tensions) and objects of representation which are sensitive (which are or become sensitive in the process of representational elaboration, in the sense that inter-group tensions in the past and which are persistent even today

make it difficult to create SRs about these social objects, because, although they are important for a certain group, they may be "passed over" for the descendants of that group).

***2. Polemic representations***. With reference to the classification of SR proposed by S. Moscovici, one of the problems that have not been elucidated so far is the following: can we talk about polemical SR as a separate, autonomous category, or is it a transition of the same representation over time, from a polemical SR to one with hegemonic status. In this sense, I consider that both versions are possible, suggesting in this sense two premises of investigation: 1) polemical representations can exist for a relatively long time, having an autonomous status in a social framework, either openly expressed or tabooed, and 2) polemical representations can reach a dominant position in the course of time, depending on the group's capacity of assertion, negotiation and persistence over time (in this context the active minority theory is also relevant). Thus, we believe that further studies should examine in depth *how* and *under what* social or political conditions a representation is transformed from a polemical to a hegemonic one, i.e., what happens to polemical representations that do not reach a hegemonic status at the societal level and how these representations are negotiated at the societal and intergroup level. Regarding the analysis presented in Chapter 4, I must admit that I have predominantly used only articles published in Romanian and English. I believe that this analysis would allow me to make essential gains in the development of the concept of polemical representation if articles published in other languages, for example, French, Spanish or Portuguese, were also included.

**Recommendations on potential directions for further research.** I propose several research directions: a) the study of polemical representations from a sociogenetic perspective; b) the study of polemical representations from a cross-sectional and longitudinal perspective; c) the study of the societal impact of polemical representations; d) the study of SR on the credibility and role attributed to scientific knowledge at the present stage and e) how polemical representations develop in oppositional contexts.

**Recommendations for using the results.** Why is it important to study SR and, in particular, why is it essential to know the polemical representations? Firstly, due to the societal influence and impact they exert on relational dynamics. That is, in order to understand the actions of different social groups, we must first know and understand the SR that guides their actions. At the same time, polemical representations are a tool for action in the field of socio-political and electoral debates. If not for the immediate purpose of intervention, we are referring here to psychological interventions, then in the case of psychosocial intervention programmes or long-lasting social campaigns (organised, systematic, with the aim of change), SR are the essential ideas or "driving forces" on which such social or organisational change projects can be based.

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## List of the author's publications on the thesis' topic

(2007-2022, after the PhD Defence)

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**International** (abroad) **– 6**

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**National** (with international participation) **– 9**

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**Handbooks for students (author) – 2**

39. COJOCARU, N. (2012). *Psihologia influenţei sociale.* Chișinău: CEP USM, 8.9 c.a., 114 p. ISBN 978-9975-71-287-3.
40. COJOCARU, N. (2010). *Cercetare calitativă*. Chișinău: CEP USM, 10.0 c.a., 175 p. ISBN 978-9975-71-050-3.

**Other works**

**Research reports** (online) – 1

41. COJOCARU, N.; COJOCARU, O. (2016). Making it through: pioneer migration pathways of Moldovans in Italy. ERSTE Foundation Vienna: Raport de cercetare. http://social-research.erstestiftung.net/publication/making-it-through-pioneer-migration-pathways-of-moldovans-in-italy/

# ADNOTARE

**COJOCARU Natalia,**
**„Obiecte sensibile, reprezentări polemice și relații intergrupuri: conceptualizări teoretico-metodologice și ilustrări empirice”, teză de doctor habilitat în psihologie, Chișinău, 2024.**

**Structura tezei:** adnotări, introducere, 7 capitole, concluzii și recomandări (text de bază – 264 p.), 13 tabele, 13 figuri, 388 referințe bibliografice (129 – l. română, 10 – l. rusă și 249 – l. engleză) și 15 anexe. Rezultatele cercetării sunt prezentate în 41 publicații.
**Cuvinte cheie:** obiecte sensibile, reprezentări polemice, relații intergrupuri, clasificarea reprezentărilor sociale, memorie colectivă, COVID-19, proteste colective, sărbători sovietice.
**Scopul lucrării:** determinarea fundamentelor teoretice, metodologice și empirice privind implicațiile *obiectelor sensibile* în geneza *reprezentăilor polemice* în contextul dinamicilor opoziționale la nivelul *relațiilor intergrupuri.*
**Obiectivele cercetării: O1.** Elucidarea evoluțiilor și a tendințelor curente în studiile din domeniul reprezentărilor sociale, în vederea identificării unor direcții de cercetare care suscită dezbateri la etapa actuală și necesită explorări extensive; **O2.** Concretizarea aspectelor teoretice și metodologice relevante pentru demararea unui studiu privind reprezentările sociale, în vederea elaborării unui model teoretico-reflexiv ce ar putea fi utilizat drept cadru de analiză a unei reprezentări sociale la debutul cercetării acesteia; **O3.** Esențializarea teoretică a conceptului de *obiect sensibil,* evidențiindu-se caracteristicile obiectelor sensibile, dilemele normativ-etice și implicațiile cognitiv-afective pe care le comportă interacțiunea dintre cercetător și subiecți în studiul acestora, implicit impactul pe care le au obiectele sensibile asupra producțiilor discursive; **O4.** Identificarea studiilor privind clasificarea reprezentările sociale (Moscovici, 1988), din momentul apariției (1988) și până la etapa actuală, în vederea elaborării unor sinteze metanalitice cu referire la conceptul de *reprezentare polemică*, evidențiindu-se specificul și caracteristicile reprezentărilor polemice; **O5.** Examinarea unor studii de caz din istoria recentă a RM (din trei domenii: socioistoric, sociopolitic și sociomedical), care pot fi abordate ca niște *obiecte sensibile*, urmând să elucidăm cum se modelează *reprezentările polemice* în funcție de aceste obiecte de reprezentare*”*; **O6.** Evidențierea specificului unor condiții contextuale (sociale, mediatice și reprezentaționale), practici sociale și dinamici relaționale intergrupuri cu implicații în geneza și elaborarea *reprezentărilor polemice*; **O7.** Clarificarea unor potențiale traiectorii psihosociale în evoluția *reprezentărilor polemice* în funcție de dinimicile opoziționale la nivel integrupuri.
**Rezultatele științifice** care au determinat crearea unei noi direcţii ştiinţifice (descriere succintă a rezultatelor, prezentare detaliată – la p. 279): **R1 –** evoluții și tendințe actuale în studiul reprezentărilor sociale; **R2 –** principii teoretice și metodologice în studiul reprezentărilor sociale; **R3 –** caracteristici ale obiectelor sensibile, dileme etice și implicații cognitiv-afective în studiul obiectelor sensibile; **R4 –** etape în evoluția studiilor privind reprezentărilor polemice, tematici specifice și caracteristici ale reprezentărilor polemice; **R5 –** procesul de elaborare a reprezentărilor polemice în funcție de obiectele sensibile; **R6 –** procesul de elaborare a reprezentărilor polemice în funcție de context (social, mediatic și reprezentațional), practici sociale și dinamici ale relațiilor inter-grupuri; **R7 –** supoziții privind potențiale traiectorii psihosociale în evoluția reprezentărilor polemice.
**Noutatea și originalitatea științifică:** Este una dintre primele lucrări în care se examinează într-un cadru unitar aspecte teoretice, metodologice și empirice privind implicațiile pe care le comportă obiectele sensibile în geneza reprezentărilor polemice, inclusiv interrelația dintre aceste două fenomene și influențele pe care le produc asupra relațiilor intergrupuri. Totodată, elementele inedite constau în modul în care este abordată această interrelație – dintr-o perspectivă narativă și cea a studiului de caz (strategii metodologice pe care le considerăm esențiale în studiul subiectelor controversate).
**Semnificația teoretică:** În primul rând, în această lucrare au fost identificate tendințele actuale în studiul reprezentărilor sociale și principalele direcții de cercetare care necesită explorări extensive, find analizată clasificarea reprezentărilor sociale, dar și dezbaterile teoretice legate de această clasificare. În al doilea rând, ne-am propus să oferim anumite conceptualizări pentru *obiectele sensibile* și *reprezentările polemice,* inclusiv să evidențiem particularități specifice în studiul acestora. Astfel, au fost evidențiate caracteristici și note definitorii ale obiectelor sensibile, dileme normativ-etice și implicații cognitiv-afective în abordarea acestora. Analiza studiilor despre reprezentările polemice (1988-2022) a permis elaborarea unor sinteze metaanalitice, fiind conturate evoluții și problematici recente în studiul reprezentărilor polemice, inclusiv caracteristici ale acestora. Reieșind din aceste analize, au fost sugerate și traiectorii pe care le comportă acest tip de reprezentare la nivel societal și intergrupuri și direcții ulterioare de studiu.
**Valoarea aplicativă:** Lucrarea se adresează în primul rând *comunității academice* (cercetători, cadre didactice, studenți), prezentând un studiu complex privind geneza reprezentărilor polemice și implicațiile pe care le comportă obiectele sensibile în dinamica și evoluția acestora, totodată, conținând și aspecte legate de specificul cercetării sensibile și rolul cercetătorului în asigurarea autenti-cității producțiilor discursive ale subiecților în cadrul unor asemenea cercetări. Modelul teoretico-reflexiv, propus de noi în lucrare, poate fi utilizat drept cadru de analiză a unei reprezentări sociale la debutul cercetării acesteia. Respectiv, ne exprimăm încrederea că lucrarea va prezenta interes și pentru *practicieni* (consilieri, factori de decizie, psihologi) pentru a înțelege mai bine cum funcțio-nează dinamicile relaționale intergrupuri în ceea ce privește atitudinile și comportamentul pe care îl adoptă grupurile în situații de controverse sociale și conflict. Pentru *publicul larg* interesat de problematica relațiilor intergrupuri prezentăm diverse ilustrări empi-rice cu referire la această tematică (în baza studiilor realizate în diverse țări sau a celor realizate de autoarea lucrării).
**Implementarea rezultatelor științifice:**
**a)** activități didactice, de cercetare și de documentare științifică (Portugalia, 2022; Italia, 2015; Italia, 2012 ș.a.);
**b)** monografie, apreciată cu diplomă de excelență la salonul de carte EUROINVENT (mai 2019, România);
**c)** comunicări la diverse manifestări științifice **(25)**: internaționale (15), naționale (10), *v.* detalii, pp. 357-360;
**d)** workshop-uri și cursuri de formare: CIPA, ed. a II-a (USM, 2022); Conferința „Integrare prin cercetare și inovare” (USM, 2016); „Managementul schimbării: aspecte psihosociale” (curs de formare, USM, 2021-2023).
**e)** cursuri universitare: „Psihologia socială”, „Psihologia relațiilor integrupuri”, „Cercetarea calitativă” ș.a.;
**f)** publicații **(41)**: 1 monografie, 4 monografii/în colab., 33 articole și comunicări la conferințe ș.a, *v.* detalii, pp. 361-363.

# ANNOTATION

**COJOCARU Natalia,**
**"Sensitive objects, polemical representations and intergroup relations: Theoretical-methodological conceptualizations and empirical illustrations", Habilitation Thesis in Psychology, Chisinau, 2024**.

**Structure of the thesis**: annotations, introduction, 7 chapters, conclusions and recommendations (basic text – 264 p.), 13 tables, 13 figures, 388 bibliographic references (129 – Romanian, 10 – Russian and 249 – English) and 15 annexes. The research results are presented in 41 publications.
**Keywords:** sensitive objects, polemical representations, intergroup relations, classification of social representations, collective memory, COVID-19, collective protests, Soviet holidays.
**The aim of the thesis**: to determine the theoretical, methodological and empirical foundations regarding the *sensitive objects* in the genesis of *polemical representations* according to the oppositional dynamics at the level of *intergroup relations*.
**Research objectives: O1.** To elucidate the current developments and trends in social representations studies in order to identify research directions that currently raise debates and require extensive explorations; **O2.** To examine the theoretical and methodological aspects which are relevant for a study on social representations in order to develop a theoretical-reflexive model that could be used as a framework for analysis of a social representation, at the beginning of research; **O3.** To synthetise theoretically the concept of *sensitive object*, highlighting the characteristics of sensitive objects, the normative-ethical dilemmas and the cognitiv-affective implications of the interaction between the researcher and the subjects in the process of research, and implicitly the impact that sensitive objects have on discursive productions; **O4.** To identify studies addressing the classification of social representations (Moscovici, 1988), from the moment of its appearance (1988) until the current stage in order to elaborate meta-analytic syntheses on the concept of *polemical representations* highlighting its specifics and characteristics; **O5**. To examine several case studies from the recent history of the Republic of Moldova (from three fields: sociohistorical, sociopolitical and sociomedical) which can be approached as *sensitive objects*, elucidating how *polemical representations* is shaped accor-ding to these objects of representation; **O6.** To highlight the specificity of some contextual conditions (social, media and representational), social practices and intergroup relations dynamics which play a role in the genesis and elaboration of *polemical representations*; **O7**. To clarify some potential psychosocial trajectories in the evolution of *polemical representations* depending on the oppositional dynamics at the level of intergroup level.
**Scientific results** (brief description of results, detailed presentation – on p. 279): **R1** – current developments and trends in the study of social representations; **R2** – theoretical and methodological principles in the study of social representations; **R3** – characteristics of sensitive objects, ethical dilemmas and cognitiv-affective implications in the study of sensitive objects; **R4** – stages in the evolution of studies on polemical representations, specific themes and characteristics of polemical representations; **R5** – the process of elaboration of polemical representations in relation to the sensitive objects; **R6** – the process of elaboration of polemical representations depending on the context (social, media and representational), social and dynamic practices of intergroup relations; **R7** – supositions regarding potential psychosocial trajectories in the evolution of the polemical representations.
**Scientific novelty and originality:** It is one of the first works in which theoretical, methodological and empirical aspects regarding the implications of *sensitive objects* in the genesis of *polemical representations* are examined in a unified framework, including the inter-relationships between these two phenomena as well as the influences they produce on intergroup relations. At the same time, the novel elements consist in the way in which these interrelationships are approached – from a narrative perspective and that of the case study (methodological strategies that we consider essential in the study of controversial topics).
**Theoretical significance of the work**: First of all, in this work, the current trends in the study of social representations and the main research directions that require extensive explorations were identified, while also analyzing the classification of social representations, as well as the theoretical debates related to this classification. Second, we aimed to provide certain conceptualizations for *sensitive objects* and *polemical representations*, including specific peculiarities in their study. Thus, the characteristics of sensitive objects, normative-ethical dilemmas and cognitive-affective implications in their approach were highlighted. The analysis of studies on polemical representations (1988-2022) allowed the development of some meta-analytic syntheses, with recent developments and issues being outlined in the study of polemical representations, including their characteristics. Emerging from these analyses, the trajectories that this type of societal and intergroup representation entails and further directions of study have been suggested.
**The applicative value of the work**: This work is primarily addressed to the academic community (researchers, teachers, students), presen-ting a complex study regarding the genesis of polemical representations and the implications that sensitive objects have in their dynamics and evolution, at the same time, also containing aspects related to the specifics of sensitive research and the role of the researcher in ensuring the authenticity of the subjects' discursive productions within such research. We believe that, the theoretical-reflexive model, proposed by us in the thesis, can be used as a framework for the analysis of a given social representations. Accordingly, we are confident that the work will also be of interest to practitioners (counselors, decision-makers, psychologists) to better understand how intergroup relational dynamics work in terms of the attitudes and behavior that groups adopt in situations of social controversy and conflict. Not least, the general public, interested in the issue of intergroup relations, will be offered various empirical illustrations with reference to this topic (based on studies carried out in various countries or those conducted by the author of the thesis).
**Implementation of scientific results:**
**a)** didactic, research and scientific activities (Portugal, 2022; Italy, 2015; Italy, 2012);
**b)** monograph, awarded with a excellence diploma at the EUROINVENT book fair (May 2019, Romania);
**c)** reports at different scientific conferences **(25)**: international (15), national (10) *see* details, pp. 357-560;
**d)** workshops and training courses: CIPA, 2nd ed. (MSU, 2022); Integration through Research and Innovation Conference (MSU, 2016); „Management of change: psychosocial aspects" (training course, MSU, 2021-2023).
**e)** university courses: „Social Psychology", „Psychology of Intergroup Relations", „Qualitative Research" etc.);
**f)** publications **(41)**: 1 monograph, 4 monographs/in colab., 33 articles and conference reports *see*, pp. 361-363).

# АННОТАЦИЯ

**КОЖОКАРУ Наталья,**
**„Сенситивные объекты, полемические представления и межгрупповые отношения: теоретико-методологические концепции и эмпирические иллюстрации”,**
**Диссертация на соискание ученой степени доктора хабилитат в психологии. Кишинэу, 2024.**

**Структура диссертации:** аннотации, введение, семь глав, общие выводы и рекомендации (основной текст – 264 страниц), библиография из 388 источников (129 – на румынском языке, 10 – на русском языке и 249 – на английском языке), 13 таблиц, 13 рисунков, 15 приложений. Результаты исследования опубликованы в 41 научных работах.

**Ключевые слова**: сенситивные объекты, полемические представления, межгрупповые отношения, классификация социальных представлений, коллективная память, COVID-19, коллективные протесты, советские праздники.

**Цель исследования:** определение теоретических, методологических и эмпирических основ *сенситивных объектов* в формировании *полемических представлений* в контексте оппозиционных *межгрупповых отношений*.

**Задачи исследования: З1.** Выделение развития и современных тенденций исследований в области социальных представлений с целью выявления некоторых направлений исследований, вызывающих дискуссию на современном этапе и требующих обширных исследований; **З2.** Конкретизация соответствующих теоретико-методологических аспектов для изучения социальных представлений с целью разработки теоретико-рефлексивной модели, которая может быть использована в качестве основы анализа социального представления в начале исследования; **З3.** Теоретическое обоснование понятии *сенситивный объект*, выделение характеристик сенситивных объектов, нормативно-этических дилемм и когнитивно-аффективных последствий взаимодействия исследователя и респондентов при их изучении и воздействие, которое оказывают сенситивные объекты на дискурс испытуемых; **З4.** Выявление исследований, посвященных классификации социальных представлений (Moscovici, 1988), с момента ее появления (1988) до современного этапа, с целью разработки мета-аналитических обобще-ний применительно к понятию *полемическое представление*, выделив специфику и характеристики полемических представлений; **З5.** Изучение конкретных примеров из новейшей истории Республики Молдова (из трех областей: социально-исторической, социально-политической и социально-медицинской), которые можно рассматривать как *сенситивные объекты* и выясние, как формируются *полеми-ческие представления* в соответствии с этими объектами; **З6.** Выделение специфики некоторых контекстуальных условий (социальных, медийных и репрезентативных), социальных практик и динамики межгрупповых отношений, оказывающих влияние на формирование и развитие *полемических представлений*; **З7.** Уточнение потенциальных психосоциальных траекторий эволюции *полемических представле-ний* в условиях оппозиционной динамики на групповом межгрупповом уровне.

**Научные результаты**, которые способствовали становлению нового направления исследования (краткое описание результатов, подробное изложение – на стр. 279): **Р1** – современные разработки и тенденции в изучении социальных представлений; **Р2** – теоретико-методологические принципы изучения социальных представлений; **Р3** – характеристики сенситивных объектов, этические дилеммы и когнитивно-аффективные последствия при изучении сенситивных объектов; **Р4** – этапы эволюции исследований полемических представлений, специфические темы и характеристики полемических представлений; **Р5** – процесс формировании полемических представлений в зависимости от сенситивных объектов; **Р6** – процесс формирования полемических представлений в зависимости от контекста (социального, медийного и репрезентативного), социальных практик и динамики межгрупповых отношений; **Р7** – предпо-ложения о возможных психосоциальных траекториях в эволюции полемических представлений.

**Научная новизна и оригинальность:** Это одна из первых работ, в которой в едином ключе рассматриваются теоретические, методологические и эмпирические аспекты роли *сенситивных объектов* в генезисе *полемических представлений*, включая взаимосвязь между этими двумя феноменами и влияние, которое они оказывают на межгрупповые отношения. В то же время элементы оригинальности заклю-чаются в подходе к этой взаимосвязи с позиций нарративного исследования на конкретных примерах (методологические стратегии, которые мы считаем важными при изучении спорных тем).

**Теоретическая значимость:** Прежде всего, в данной работе определены современные тенденции в изучении социальных представлений и основные направления исследований требующие дальнейшей проработки, а также проанализирована классификация социальных представлений и связанные с ней теоретические дискуссии. Во-вторых, мы стремились дать определенные концептуализации *сенситивных объектов* и *полемических представлений*, в том числе прояснить особенности их изучения. Таким образом, были выделены определяющие характеристики сенситивных объектов, нормативно-этические дилеммы и когнитивно-аффективные эффекты в их исследовании. При анализе исследований полемических представлений (1988-2022 гг.) был разработан мета-аналитический синтез эволюции исследований полемических представлений (1988-2022 гг.), изложены актуальные проблемы изучения полемических представлений и их характеристик. В результате этого анализа были предложены траектории развития данного типа представлений на социальном и межгрупповом уровнях и дальнейшие направления ~~в~~ исследований.

**Практическая значимость:** Работа адресована в первую очередь академическому сообществу (исследователям, преподавателям, студентам), представляя собой комплексное исследование генезиса полемических представлений и роли сенситивных объектов в их динамике и эволюции, а также содержит аспекты, связанные со спецификой сенситивных исследований и ролью исследователя в обеспечении аутентичности дискурсов субъектов таких исследований; теоретико-рефлексивная модель, предложенная нами, может быть использована в качестве основы для анализа социальных представлений на начальном этапе их исследований. Соответственно, мы уверены, что работа будет интересна и практикующим специалистам (консультантам, руководителям, психологам) для лучшего понимания того, как динамика межгрупповых отношений влияет на установки и поведение групп в ситуациях социальных противоречий и конфликтов. Для широкой публики, интересующейся межгрупповыми отношениями, мы приводим различные эмпирические иллюстрации по данной теме (на основе исследований, проведенных в разных странах, а также автором данного исследования).

**Внедрение результатов исследования:**

а) в практике образовательного процесса и научно-исследовательской деятельности (Португалия, 2022 г.; Италия, 2015 г.; Италия 2012 г. и др.);

б) монография, отмеченная дипломом отличия на EUROINVENT (май 2019 г., Румыния);

в) доклады на научных конференций (25): международных (15), национальных (10), см. подробнее стр. 357-360;

г) мастер-классы и учебные курсы: в рамках CIPA (МГУ, 2022 г.), конференции «Интеграция через исследование и инновации» (МГУ, 2016 г.); «Управление организационными изменениями: психосоциальные аспекты» (курс непрерывного обучения, МГУ, 2021-2023 гг.).

д) учебные курсы для студентов и магистрантов МГУ: «Социальная психология», «Психология межгрупповых отношений», «Качественное исследование» и др.);

f) публикации (41): 1 монография, 4 монографии/в соавторстве, 33 статьи и доклады на конференциях, см. подробн на стр.361-363).

**COJOCARU Natalia**

# SENSITIVE OBJECTS, POLEMICAL REPRESENTATIONS AND INTERGROUP RELATIONS

## Theoretical-methodological conceptualizations and empirical illustrations

**Specialties**:
General Psychology – 511.01
Social Psychology – 511.03

Summary of the thesis of the doctorate in psychology


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