

NEXUS, THE PRELOGICAL KNOT THAT ORGANIZES AND MOBILIZES THE CROWDS

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Abstract

Nexus stands for an affective prelogical knot common to a large number of individuals in a particular community. It is a knot in the sense that it “associates and connects a series of attitudes” and is affectively prelogical because it can “instantly operate a rejection or adhesion” (“which leaves no room for reasoning or afterthought”). Its anchoring in reality is achieved by issuing clear opinions, firm positions or mobilizing slogans. Ultimately, these categories of individuals only have to manifest themselves for or against the produced assessment. The maximum effect is reached in crisis situations, “with the occurrence of real or imaginary abnormal events in the social life (conflicts, collective threats, etc.).”

Keywords: *nexus, knowledge, affect, social thinking, social representations.*

Michel-Louis Rouquette, who founded and has led for many years the famous *Environmental Psychology Laboratory at Paris-Descartes University (Paris 5)*, offers the first information about the opportunity to include the concept of nexus in the study of human interactions. At the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, he issued two reference works - *La psychologie politique* (ROUQUETTE, 1988) and *Sur la connaissance des masses. Essai de psychologie politique*, respectively (ROUQUETTE, 1994) - which contain a less common view of “collective mobilization behaviors to which a rational basis can not be identified”. According to the well-known French psychologist, the understanding and explaining of these behaviors depend to a great extent on the *relationship between knowledge and affection/emotion*.

But what does it mean to be lead by the existing *relationship between knowledge and affection*? The most appropriate answer M.-L. Rouquette, believes, is to fold to what is called *nexus*¹. In such a case, interpretations will have to take into account the existence of a *prelogic affective node common to a large number of individuals in a*

particular community. But, *nexus* is a *knot* in meaning that it “associates and connects more attitudes” and is *prelogically affective* because it can “instantly perform a rejection or an adhesion” (“which leaves no room either for reasoning or reflection”).

In essence, M.-L. Rouquette and those who continued his work - such as S. Delouvé (DELOUVÉE, 2004; DELOUVÉE, 2005) and / or M. Curelaru (CURELARU, 2006), show that the *nexus* appears in the variant of some terms that are more often *abstract* and which, at the same time, are *indisputable* for a community situated in a pressing existential context. The anchoring in reality is accomplished by issuing *clear opinions, firm taking stands, or mobilizing slogans*. Ultimately, the members of the collectivity concerned with have nothing to do but to manifest themselves in connection with the utterance/emission produced either *for* or *against*. The maximum effect is reached in *crisis situations*, “with the occurrence of abnormal events in the social life (conflicts, collective threats, etc.), real or imaginary.” Now, it is extremely important to impose at the forefront stimulating expressions such as *homeland, justice, freedom, equality, justice and/or truth*. Nothing unusual, in fact: “When the social inequalities are oppressive and reach an unbearable threshold, the theme of equality is launched, becomes exciting, and can give rise to a revolution.” Similarly, *freedom* and *homeland* are topics that activate themselves immediately when “the nation is in danger”. The *Nexus*, as we can see, does not keep in any way to logic or to consistent thinking, of argumentation or counter-argumentation, because the *affection/emotion* comes first each time, that is, the exaggeratedly intense soul movement². The connection *mobilization - affection label*, the specialists say - R.

P. Wolter, for instance (WOLTER, 2010) gives a fundamental aspect of *nexus*: *the two elements can not be dissociated*. There is no collective mobilization phenomenon that does not appeal to *nexus* and, on the contrary - it is difficult to imagine the *nexus* without a mobilization effect.

The experimental study dedicated to the *Nazi nexus*, conducted by M.-L. Rouquette in 1994 and incorporated into the already mentioned *Sur at connaissance des masses*.

Essai de psychologie politique, fully illustrates the statement about the *engaging function of the affective state*. In the study, a number of 37 students were presented with eight statements that featured in the NSDAP (National

Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei) electoral program:

- In the questionnaire distributed to 12 subjects, the allegations were associated with a "political party" (*control group*);
- In the questionnaire distributed to other 12 subjects, the allegations were associated with the "National Socialist Party";
- In the questionnaire that reached the last 13 subjects, the allegations were associated with the "Nazi Party".

Each of the statements submitted to the sample subjects was evaluated on a Likert scale in 5 points, ranging from "perfect agreement" to "total disagreement."

Table 1. The results of the Nazi Nexus Study: the number of rejected assertions, according to the label

	"Political party" Label	"National-socialist party" Label	"Nazi party" Label
Rejected assertions	28 (30%)	28 (30%)	50 (48%)
Accepted assertions	68 (70%)	68 (70%)	54 (52%)

Analyzing the table above, we find that when the assertions are associated with a "political party" (any) or a "national-socialist party", the rejection percentage is 30% (28/96). If the assertions are associated with the "Nazi Party", the rejection rate increases, reaching a 48% share (the difference from the other conditions is significant at the x2 test, where $p < 0.01$). The label "Nazi Party" has led to the emergence of a doubtless *nexus*. By hating Nazism, the subjects rejected with greater power the statements reported to the party that it represents. We have at this moment an "*affective and prelogic*" rejection, because "the subjects assessed negatively the assertions based on their attitude (rejection) to *Nazism* instead of doing it on the basis of the content presented".

Comprising various data concerning the *nexus* and the peculiarities of its manifestation on the dimension of "the present or past, real or imaginary interactions between the human conducts", M.-L. Rouquette points out - in the same *Sur at connaissance des masses. Essai de psychologie politique*³ - the following defining features of the phenomenon:

- *it bears a collective character and is shared by most members of a community at a time;*

- *it is a mobilizer and momentary cancelstheinter- and intra-group differences;*
- *it is especially active during times of crisis and danger;*
- *it is not a elaboration of reality, but of social imagery;*
- *it is an irreducible elaboration of a particular content, presenting itself as a "quasi-concept";*
- *it is expressed in a unique term that can not be replaced by any equivalent term ("crazy", for example, is not the same with "mentally ill");*
- *the privileged discursive form is the emphasis (proclamations, hymns, slogans, adhesion statements, public condemnations, etc.), observable state, during solemn political speeches, in which a certain vehemence of language expresses the lack of measure of the affection/emotion.*

From the very beginning - of course, we refer to the findings available in the two initiatory papers of M.-L. Rouquette (*La psychologie politique și Sur la connaissance des masses. Essai de psychologie politique*) - the *nexus* appears as a *psychomental construct integrated into the social representation*, or, better, as a *form of social thinking about which it can be said that it is complementary to the central nucleus (expressing its affective value)*. Subsequently, the

same angle of view is encountered by many other explorers of the social field. Here are just a few examples:

- **C. Guimelli:** the *nexus* corresponds to some aspects - very emotionally rich - of social representations (GUIMELLI, 1999);
- **P. H. F. Campos:** the *nexus* expresses the affective dimension of social representations in relation to crowd mobilization (CAMPOS & ROUQUETTE, 2000);
- **M. Curelaru:** within the emotional component of a social representation we can always identify a *nexus* (CURELARU, 2006).

In spite of the fact that, over time, voices have been heard through which the *nexus* is seen as a *specific form of social thinking*, likely to anticipate the appearance of social representations, to precede them in elaboration⁴, the angle of view on which initially, M.-L. Rouquette, to which C. Guimelli, P. H. F. Campos, M. Curelaru and many other important figures in the field of social psychology adhere, succeeds in maintaining a privileged position, ultimately giving it the status of *nulli secundus* (ROUQUETTE, 1994; DELOUVÉE, 2004; ROUQUETTE & WOLTER 2006).

To provide the necessary evidence, we will specify that in the last 10-15 years most researchers tend to use the *nexus* concept with reference to social representations, and not to another level of mass thinking. Among them, to give some examples, J.-M. Seca (SECA, 2003) with C. Guimelli (GUIMELLI, 1999), P. H. F. Campos and M.-L. Rouquette (CAMPOS & ROUQUETTE, 2003; CAMPOS & ROUQUETTE, 2000), P. Chareaudeau with R. Montes (CHAREAUDEAU, 2004), A. De Rosa with R. Farr (DE ROSA & FARR, 2001), G. Lo Monaco with P. Rateau and C. Guimelli (GUIMELLI et al., 2007), N. Roussiau and E. Renard (ROUSSIAU & RENARD 2004), C. Demontis with A. Gruev-Ventila, C. Pouet and A. Hellmuth (DEMONTIS et al., 2010). Even if, in some cases - we refer in particular to those related to S. C. Calonge's research (CALONGE, 2001a; CALONGE, 2001b; CALONGE, 2003; CALONGE, 2005) or O. Camus (CAMUS, 2002), V. Carranza (CARRANZA, 2003) or S. Delouvee (DELOUVEE, 2004; DELOUVEE, 2005), N. W. Wagner Kronberger (KRONBERGER & WAGNER 2002) - the *nexus* is present "independently" (not being related, therefore, to the social representation),

this, however, is not done in a categorical manner, that is, as RP Wolter prefers to say⁵, it is not explicitly stated that it, the *nexus*, represents a *particular species of social thought*.

That being said, let us finally see how, in the context of some studies with an empirical character, the *nexus* is imposed as "a form of social thought complementary to the central nucleus, expressing its affective value." In such a line of thought, it would obviously have been very well to review all or almost all investigations in which the complementarity involved is concerned. But, for lack of space, we will limit ourselves to just two of them - *Nexus, représentations sociales et masquage des divergences intra et intergroupes* conducted by G. Lo Monaco, P. Rateau, C. Guimelli (Guimelli et al., 2007) and the *Social representations of terrorism* by C. Demontis, A. Gruev-Vintila, C. Pouet and A. Hellmuth (DEMONTIS et al., 2007; ERNST-VINTILA, 2010).

In the first study, conducted in 2006 it was intended the association of the *nexus* "freedom" with "ideal group" last rendering an object which was already known at that time, that "it is widely used in the structural approach of social representations"⁶.

The accumulated data has allowed us to establish two essential characteristics of the *nexus* to which the interest was expressed: the fact that it is able to "cancel the intra- and inter-group differences" and that its evocation "seems to cause adhesion to the object or its rejection in an unconditional and unanimous manner." *Veritatis simplex oratio est*: whenever the *nexus* "freedom" is associated with the ideal group, "individuals recognize it massively, even if it does not manifest itself in accordance with the central prescriptions" (or, in the case of the "ideal group," the central prescription is that it "must have no hierarchy"); and on the contrary - whenever "freedom" is threatened, the individuals "no longer recognize the object". The presence of *nexus* "freedom," concludes the authors of the study, is indisputable. His relationship with the central core of the representation and the mobilizing potential that they have are in the field of evidence.

In the second study, conducted from November 2006 to July 2007, it was checked whether personal involvement⁷ of individuals affected their

representations of terrorism. The study was based on a questionnaire applied to the passengers from the airports *Marseille - Provence* (France) and *Boston - Logan* (United States of America). The analysis focused on three types of participants, differentiated according to the level of personal involvement and counter-terrorism practice: French passengers and American passengers, as well as security staff at *Marseille-Provence* airport. The results obtained have shown that the structure of social representations regarding terrorism is shaped by the personal involvement of individuals that are related to the risk of such a phenomenon as well as by the practices related to the administration of such a risk. Thus, the dominant theme in the staff's speech was that of *safety and security*, and passenger discourse centered on the *responsibility of the governors* and on a series of elements that shaped the *etiology of terrorism* (the politics being mostly held responsible for the latter). While the social representation expressed by the staff had a more *practical orientation*, the one that stood out in the passenger environment was *more normative, more evaluative, more attributive, not being prescriptive in terms of behavioral styles*. In addition, the results of the *Marseille-Provence* and *Boston-Logan* studies have also determined that the social representations activated by the subjects involved in the experiment also contained a series of *nexus* (*fear- for French passengers; fear, dead, Muslims - to American passengers; bomb - to security staff*) who were able to mobilize them, clearly defining the potential means of the act of terrorism, its authors and its adverse consequences. The central elements with a strong emotional burden (*fear, dead, Muslims, bomb*) have in turn generated analogous meanings for many peripheral items (*Sept. 11, Al-Qaida, insecurity, Ben Laden, Islam, chaos, murder, extremists, explosion*), through which, ultimately, there is nothing else but to establish, as it is well known, *the scripts of action related to the object of representation*.

Both experimental studies - the one realized in terms of association with the *ideal group* and the one made in the perimeter of *Marseille-Provence* & *Boston-Logan* airports - constitute, as we can see, an eloquent proof that the *nexus* notion really has an entirely special function - *to explain the behavior of mass mobilization*. All those who, from 1988 onwards, drawing up theoretical works

or conducting empirical research, have ceased to believe that the *nexus* is a form of social thinking that expresses the affective dimension of social representation, or, more precisely, a psychomental construction is complementary to the central nucleus of social representation, expressing its emotional-pre-logical value in relation to the mobilization of members of a community, have chosen, as we can conclude, the appropriate interpretative approach, presenting things in the light that fits them best.

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Endnotes

1. With Latin origin, the word *nexus* means *relationship, connection, chaining between things, facts, and / or phenomena*. For confirmation, see, for example, Chihai L., Cifor L., Ciobanu A., Ciubotaru M., Cobel D. et al. *Illustrated encyclopaedic dictionary*. – Chișinău: Cartier Publishing House, 1999. – p. 639 and / or Scriban A. *Romanian Dictionary: Etymologies, Meaning, Examples, Quotations, Archaisms, Neologisms, Provincialism / Anastatic Edition* Prepared and Prepared by I. Opreșan. – Bucharest: Saeculum I.O. Publishing House, 2013. – p. 871.
2. After M.-L. Rouquette, when in the case of *nexus*, we talk about *affection/emotion*, it is important to remember that “we do not refer to an individual emotion, possibly measurable by physical manifestations such as palpitations, sweating or trembling, but to something else: the attraction felt toward the nexus object”. For confirmation and other details, see Rouquette M.-L. (sous-la-direction). *Social pensée. Perspectives fondamentales et recherches appliquées*. – Toulouse: ERES, 2009. – p. 87 and / or Rouquette M.-L. (Eds.). *Social Thinking. Fundamental Perspectives and Applied Research / French Translation by L. Botoșineanu and F. Botoșineanu*. – Iasi: Polirom Publishing House, 2010. – P. 92.
3. See, in this regard, Rouquette M.-L. *Sur at connaissance des masses. Essai de psychologie politique*. – Grenoble: P.U.G., 1994. – P. 69-70.
4. The first one, which does not exclude the hypothesis that *nexus* might send to a specific form of social thought, and not to the affective profile of social representation, is even M.-L. Rouquette. In *Sur at connaissance des masses. Essai de psychologie politique*, he provides a clear view of the existing differences. In a tabular version, the latter show as follows:

Nexus-es	Social Representations
They do not offer an interpretation of reality, of the social or natural environment.	They are explanatory “theories” of reality, they do not have the purpose of mastery are meant to get acquainted with the unknown
They are ideological “cristalizations” that do not argumentation, justification	They are subject to permanent public debate, support adjustments, re-evaluations, contradictions
They have a strong emotional load, they are irrational and forcefully imposed on the individual (mobilizing character).	The individual participates cognitively and emotionally in their elaboration, with a varying degree of involvement or detachment
They are characterized by focus, repetition, updating	They are elaborations continually developing, based on an “interactive dialectic”
They are not subject to proof of reality, verification; are considered indisputable.	They are constantly reported to practice.
They precede the dialogue.	They are specific to the dialogue, the debate.
They are more restricted cognitive entities, more clearly delimited, with high degree of homogeneity	They are complex cognitive entities, strongly connected with practices, ideology and contextual elements

Supporting this kind of approach, S. Delouvée illustrates a few years later, the *nexus* way of assertion on two major historical events: the defeat from "Sedan" and the mobilizing for the "Homeland" 1914.

On September 1, 1870, "the noose around the French army was tightened, trapped and encircled by the German Confederation troops commanded by Von Moltke at the Sedan, and all they had to do was surrender." The defeat is total, "80,000 people are made prisoners, among them Napoleon III in person." It was a moment that "crystallized the shame felt by the French at the time". This episode in the history of France engendered "an explosion of public shame", the name "Sedan" functioning as a *nexus* [= "intense emotional load, strong rejection"]. The second example is of the same type: during World War I, the term "homeland" had a mobilizing role - "all to be found in it, regardless of political orientation or social class, the term making their appearance in almost all vignettes of period 1914-1918".

In both cases, the loyal adept of M.-L. Rouquette does not make any reference to the affective dimension of the social representations and the place that might revert it within its boundaries to the construction of the *nexus*.

In 2006, R. P. Wolter and M.-L. Rouquette demonstrated that the damage generated by a «tsunami» (after the 2004 event) is more valuable and gives rise to more support behaviors than the destructions caused by another natural catastrophe. When, for example, the tsunami label appeared in the text, 81% of respondents declared themselves ready to help them financially the victims of the disaster, the figure falling to 59% in the case of the «natural disaster» label. The study highlighted the mobilizing and implicit character of the two affective labels (= *nexus*), without specifying that they relate to the emotional component of a social representation.

5. For confirmation, see Wolter R. P. Strong affectional valency: the notion of *nexus* // M.-L. Rouquette (coord.). Social Thought: Fundamental Prospects and Applied Research / French Translation by L. Botoșineanu and F. Botoșineanu. - Iasi: Polirom Publishing House, 2010. - p. 95.
6. A substantial contribution to the crystallization of such an interpretative platform brought him the works signed by C. Flament, P. Moliner and P. Rateau in the 1980s and 1990s. In so doing, we refer to Flament C. In particular, it is a question of equilibrium to the representation of the group of J.-P. Codol, J.-P. Leyens (eds.). Cognitive analysis of social behavior.

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7. The theory of social representations, we will remind, sees in the *personal involvement* a major explanatory variable. It is the *personal involvement* that can "translate the report of an individual with a social object." This kind of translation takes place, each time, taking into account three independent components / dimensions: the *valorisation of the object* [referenced on a scale of principle going from "an unimportant fact" to "a matter of life and death"] *identification of the individual* [referenced on a scale going from "this concerns only me" ("I feel directly targeted") up to "this targets the group" ("I feel targeted, but no more than the others) and the ability of perceived action [measurable on a scale ranging from "it depends only on me" to "can do nothing."]. A maximum involvement in a *risk*, for example, is recorded if the individual feels targeted, when the matter is important and when he, the individual, can act. For confirmation and other details, see Guimelli C. Pratiques Nouvelles et transformations sans rupture d'une social représentation: la représentation de la chasse et de la nature // J.-L. Beauvois, R.-V. Joule, J.-M. Monteil (eds.). Perspectives cognitives et conduites sociales. - Vol. 2: Représentations et processus sociocognitifs.. - Cousset: Del Val, 1989. - pp. 117-141; Rouquette M.-L. Some Classes of Modes for Analyzing Relationship Entre Cognèmes // C. Guimelli (ed.). Structures and transformations of social representations. - Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1994. - pp. 153-170; Guimelli C. Differentiation between the central elements of social representations: normative versus functional elements // *Swiss Journal of Psychology*. - 1998. - No. 57 (4). - P. 209-224; Flament C, Rouquette M.-L. Anatomie des idées ordinaires. - Paris: Armand Colin, 2003 and / or Ernst-Vintila A. Personal involvement // M.-L. Rouquette (coord.). Social Thought: Fundamental Prospects and Applied Research / French Translation by L. Botoșineanu and F. Botoșineanu. - Iasi: Polirom Publishing House, 2010. - p. 224-226.