THE RISE OF A POLEMIC REPRESENTATION
IN THE CONTEXT OF *GLASNOST* REFORM

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This paper examines the sociogenesis of a polemic representation, paying close attention to the context of representational production. By means of content analysis of the written press from 1988-89, it will be illustrated how this representation originated in a context that retained past ideological characteristics both at the level of discourse and social practices and how it was presented to the *Other*. In the *perestroika* period, the official Soviet discourse, even if it was change-oriented, was thematized in the framework of the typical wooden language, so that the *new emancipated representation* (about *glasnost*) would not contradict the *hegemonic* one (of socialist ideology). Social conflict escalated when a group of intellectuals, taking advantage of the *glasnost reform,* engaged more seriously with the national issues and put forward this *polemic representation,* which opposed the *hegemonic* representation of the Soviet Communist Party. Based on in-depth interviews with participants in diverse protest actions from that period, I intended to elucidate how their polemic representation was *initially* shaped in confrontation with *Others* (those who did not share these beliefs), as well as how this was expressed at the level of intergroup relations, and how it is *now* presented by means of narrative discourses.

Keywords: polemic representation, collective memory, themata, narrative discourses.

EMERGENȚA UNEI REPREZENTĂRI POLEMICE ÎN CONTEXTUL POLITICII *GLASNOST*

În articol este examinată sociogeneza unei reprezentări polemice, o atenție specială fiind acordată contextului de elaborare reprezentațională. Prin analiza de conținut a presei scrise din perioada 1988-1989 va fi ilustrat cum s-a produs emergența acestei reprezentări în cadrul unui context care încă mai păstra caractersiticile ideologice ale trecutului, deopotrivă la nivel de discurs și de practici sociale, și cum era exprimată această reprezentare în relația cu *Celălalt*. În perioada restructurării *(perestroika)*, discursul sovietic oficial, chiar dacă era orientat spre schimbare, conținea clișee tipice limbii de lemn, astfel încât *noua reprezentare emancipativă* (despre *glasnost*) să nu fie în contradicție cu cea *hegemonică* (ideologia socialistă). Conflictul social a escaladat atunci când un grup de intelectuali, în contextul oportunităților oferite de politica *glasnost,* au pus în discuție revendicări privind problemele naționale, ceea ce exprima o *reprezentare polemică* în opoziție cu *reprezentarea hegemonică* a partidului comunist. În baza interviurilor în profunzime realizate cu participanți la diverse acțiuni de protest din acea perioadă, vom evidenția cum această reprezentare polemică s-a articulat *inițial* prin confruntarea cu *Ceilalți* (care nu împărtășeau aceste convingeri), cum era exprimată la nivel intergrupuri și cum este prezentată *acum* în cadrul narațiunilor discursive.

Cuvinte-cheie: reprezentări polemice, memorie colectivă, themata, discursuri narative.

Glasnost reform and national movement from the late '80s: a brief introduction

Glasnost facilitated the chance for Soviet citizens to express their opinions or demands. Most notably, *glasnost* created political opportunities to express national claims: in all the ex-Soviet republics, the issue of national emancipation of the local population became the central issue of discussions. The national movement from the late 1980s in the ex-Soviet Moldovan Republic is described as the rediscovery of truth about history and language after decades of official Soviet propaganda.[1] The sudden increase of masses took place in several stages. Firstly, the awareness of freedom to speak openly resulted in the intensification of social debates in mass media. Mass media became a space for propagation of the *new reforms*, in which those from the vanguard made public their opinions regarding the state of affairs. Gradually, the articles published in the mass media generated a massive social adherence. The number of those who shared the *new wave of beliefs* was constantly increasing and media space became too limited. As a result, in the next stage, the virtual space of mass media poured over the physical space of streets. Considerable mass protests broke

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[1] During the USSR, the Soviet propaganda imposed the idea of a specific "Moldavian people" with a "Moldavian" language and culture, distinct from the Romanian language.

out.[2] Because certain demands were perceived as significant by a certain social group, but deemed menacing by another, various social groups found themselves in irreconcilable opposition.

However, one of the movement's most gratifying achievement – the ratification of Romanian as the official language and return to the Latin alphabet – brought about socio-political turmoil, especially in the Eastern part of the republic. Inhabited mostly by Russian-speaking population, the region declared a quasi-independence, contesting the new linguistic legislation.[3] Language claims are frequently associated with the rise of ethnic conflicts; thus, the intergroup tensions caused a sense of guilt among the population for social conflicts and failures that followed the '90s.

The collective actions from 1989 can be understood as a struggle for social recognition of the nascent *polemic representation* about history and identity, a recurrent effort until the present days.[4] Because of its unresolved nature, the actions turned into a sensitive object of representation, hence the methodological difficulty in tackling them [1]. In other words, this representation remained *polemic,* without having reached a *social consensus* at the intergroup level.

The present work discusses the emergence of a polemic social representation that arose during the 1989 events in Moldova, one of the Soviet republics at that time, within an ideological and intergroup context that was extremely hostile to it. Our findings are based on the content analysis of the written press during *perestroika* and interviews with participants in various collective actions from that period. By means of content analysis of the written press (1988-1989), we attempted to distinguish the forms of communication by which social representations about new reforms and public meetings were structured at the level of official discourses. The interviews were aimed at retrospective descriptions of those events along with reflections on the subsequent political changes in the Republic of Moldova. As such, we dissociated between the production of *"lived"* representations, built through direct experience and representations *"transmitted"* through media.

Polemic representations and intergroup relations: a theoretical overview

In order to discuss how the recollections of '89s events were built, how they were remembered later, and implicitly assess the impact of these representations on the current political evolution, we will rely on the theory of social representations which examines the transformation of knowledge in different groups and communities through social practices and communication, and proves to be particularly useful in analysing

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[2] The most of collective actions were organized in the period of 1988-89. On 17 November 1988, a group of students picketed the Central Committee of the Communist Party in sign of disapproval with communist theses. As a consequence, police used force arresting more than 30 young people. On the Constitution Day, on 7 October 1989, a group of young people staged a protest against the constitution adopted during Soviet period. They carried banners "We advocate a multiparty system", "USSR laws are unacceptable to MSSR", "We do not want foreign lands, we want our historic territories". During this manifestation, violent clashes between police and protesters occurred, following which several young people were arrested. Hence in the second part of the day several hundred people protested, demanding the release of those arrested. In Soviet times, November 7 marked the celebration of victory of the Bolshevik revolution. As in previous years, the communist authorities prepared a military parade and a ritual celebration of the revolution, but on the morning of November 7, 1989, protesters made a wall and blocked the access to the columns of military tanks in Central Square. A few days later, on November 10, 1989 more young people and students gathered in front of the Interior Ministry, demanding the release of young people who were detained during the previous demonstration. Violent clashes occurred between policemen and the citizens who refused to leave the square.

[3] After the proclamation of MSSR's sovereignty, two other "republics" on the territory of Moldova declared themselves independent: Gagauzia and Transnistria. The main reason for the secession of Transnistria was the "fear" that once becoming an independent state, Moldova will want to reunite with Romania. In Transnistrian media, the military conflict between March-July 1992 is presented as a "sacred war against genocide caused by Moldovan nationalists." This stratagem became the target of Transnistrian propaganda, being perpetuated till nowadays. (see: N.Cojocaru. Identity and Nationalism in Transnistria. In: *Innovation. European Journal of Social Science*, 2006, no.19, p.261-272). The Gagauz invoked the same arguments to justify the need for the establishment of the Gagauz autonomy (N. Cojocaru and S.Suhan. *Psychosocial realities in Gagauzia*, Institute for Public Policy: research report, 2003).

[4] Following the explosive entrance from 1989, the other protests that took place after the independence, came as a continuum of that debut, as a "new wave of national revival". As long as apprehension about national problem persists, this "repressed conflict" comes out every time when political decisions are perceived a source of threat to identity. In one of the studies, we aimed to identify similarities between these repeated protests. Our aim was to investigate similarities between the events of protest (1989-2003), in terms of symbolic relations that structure the universe of ritual expressive practices, and their impact on mobilization. More details about the resemblances between these protests, in terms of symbolic relations and expressive ritual practices were analyzed in: N.Cojocaru. *The Return of the Repressed*: The Rise and the Decline of the Collective Protest, In: *Transitions,* 2009, no.49, p.133-144.

different collective actions.[5] According to S. Moscovici [2], social representation is a complex phenomenon, which includes a set of opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and behavioural prescriptions with reference to different social issues that enables individuals to orientate themselves in the social world and communicate with other members from the community. All social representations are deeply embedded in communicative practices, media or scientific discourses [3] and aim to turn something that is unfamiliar into familiar [4]. In S.Moscovici's [5] terms, a social representation character is revealed, especially in times of crisis, when a group experience changes. People are more willing to talk, images and expressions are more vivid, the collective memory is aroused and conduct becomes more spontaneous.

In a recent article, S.Batel and P.Castro [6] have examined the contribution of the social representations' theory to the understanding of collective protests. In this respect, as social representations are constructed dialogically, it is crucial to discern how representations associated with identities involved in the protest are negotiated and contested within and between groups. The way actors perceive the ideas and actions of *others* influences how they think and act. In order to apply the social representations' theory in the study of collective actions, one needs to examine the communicative practices, as well as social practices employed by protests actors.

As collective actions were a new social practice for ex-Soviet citizens, in the sense that until then public meetings were used merely to acclaim the Soviet regime, not to oppose to it, we can speak about elaboration of *new* representational meanings. A wide range of views and opinions with varying degrees of consensus regarding the dominant ideology infused concomitantly the society. In this regard, the classification proposed by S.Moscovici [7], who distinguished three types of representations: *hegemonic*, *emancipated* and *polemic,* is applicable. Hegemonic representations are uniform, coercive, prevailing implicitly in all symbolic or affective practices, and are shared by a highly structured group (political party or nation; e.g., representation of history in the school textbooks). These representations, similar to ideologies, are comparatively unchanging over time. *Emancipated representations* correspond with the position of a minority group, which becomes widely accepted (e.g., medical representations about health and illness that have attained widespread legitimacy). They have a certain degree of autonomy, but according to S.Ben-Asher [8], these representations usually do not contradict the hegemonic ones. On the contrary, *polemical representations* are generated in the course of a socio-political conflict or social controversy, are determined by antagonistic relations between groups and intended to be mutually exclusive. These representations must be viewed in the context of an opposition or struggle between groups and are often expressed in terms of a dialogue with an imaginary interlocutor. Society as a whole does not share them; therefore, they can be usually recognized in the attempts of one group to change the dominant representations. Often, this type of representation is perceived as being peripheral to the "mainstream" thinking and thus unworthy of attention [9]. S.Moscovici exemplifies this type with the Marxist doctrine in France which circulated in several versions, each of them shaped by the social polemic between believers and non-believers, communists and liberals, etc.

By the same token, social representations are reflexive and enable communication with *"alternative represen-tations"* [10]; within representations, there must be *"alternative"* ones – that is representations of other people's representations. Alternative representations only exist as dialogical shadows within polemical or emancipated representations. They are not representations of others, but ideas which are attributed to real or imagined *others*.

When analysing representations as products of social knowledge, one should acknowledge the fact that they are created and re-created through social interactions. This means that social representations are acquired in and through *lived social experience*. Therefore methodologically, as I.Marková [11] suggested, when looking into the social representation of a phenomenon, one should examine the relevant situation (social, historical, political) in which the representation is studied. P.Moliner [12] proposed five key questions in defining the object of a representation, *i.e.:* what are the objects of representation, for what groups, with what purposes, in

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[5] *See,* for example: Di Giacomo, G.P. Intergroup alliances and rejections within a protest movement (analysis of the social representation). In: *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 2003, no.10, p.329-344; Lowe, R. Temporality and Identity: The Role of Time in the Representations of Social Identities at Political Demonstrations. In: *Papers on Social Representations,* 2012, no.21, p.14.1-14.29; Zamperini, A.; Menegatto, M.; Travaglino, G. and Nulman, E. Social Representations of Protest and Police after the Genoa G8 Summit: A Qualitative Analysis of Activists Accounts of Events. In: *Papers on Social Representations,* 2012, no.21, p.15.1-15.30; Batel, S. and Castro, P. Collective Action and Social Change: Examining the Role of Representation in the Communication between protesters and Third-party Members. In: *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology,* 2015, no.25, p.249-263.

relation to whom and is it representation or ideology? Similarly, A. de Rosa [13] points out that the choice of the "object" of study deserves special attention in the study of social representations ("what kind" of representations and of "what", "of whom", "in which contexts" and "for which purpose").

Further, it will be examined how the representations of *perestroika* reforms were initially built in consensus with the hegemonic communist ideology but became controversial and polemic later when Pandora's Box filled with national issues broke out. In mass media, two strands of thought were identified: those who were in favour of the national claims, and those that opposed them. While analysing the narratives of my interviewees, I considered two dimensions: how they specifically reconstructed the past events and how they evaluated these events in relation to post-independence developments, in addition to how they speak to the imagined *Other* who may share or disagree with their beliefs.

The national movement in the light of mass media representations

Romanian and Russian media depictions of *restructuration* were totally polarized. Romanian language newspapers treated the national movement as a return to the Latin alphabet and symbolic restoration of ties between the two sides of the Prut River (Moldova and Romania) along with redefinition of national identity. On the other hand, Russian language newspapers defined the national movement as a threat to other ethnic groups (Russians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Gagauzians, etc.), and labelled it as *"extremist"*. In their view, collective movement's participants *"didn't show respect for other ethnic groups, as a result of insufficient internationalist education"*. (SM, no.94, 08.09.89) Therefore, a *"harmonious bilingualism is called upon"* (SM, no.160, 12.07.89), with *"two official languages – Moldovan* [Romanian] *and Russian (language spoken by everyone)"*, because *"not instituting Russian as a state language goes against Leninist conceptions about equality of languages"* (KN, 10.08.89), and only *"an equal status* [of the Russian language] *with the Moldovan* [Romanian] *language could serve as a real guarantee of rights for the Russian-speaking population"*. (SM, no.92, 19.04.89).

The *"interethnic strain"* and the general fever – *"the republic is going through tough times"* – became the central themes of media discourse during the pending language legislation. Tensions amplified in the months of May through August 1989 during discussions on the draft legislation concerning the linguistic reforms, when newspapers headlined: *"spirits reached melting temperature"*, *"charged situation"* (G, no.3, IV-VIII, 1989). The draft laws were considered *"undemocratic"* by Russian newspapers, because they *"pursued supremacy of the Moldovan people over other ethnic groups"* (SM, no.44, 04.11.89).

The polarized media discourse was mirrored in the social-political divisions (Interfront[6] and Popular Front[7]). Divergent opinions on national issues underlined social antagonisms, dispersed further the two ethnic communities and increased the social distance between them.[8] Those who insisted on the preservation of the Russian language as an official language, argued that granting Romanian the official status represented an *"attack against internationalist values and a significant damage to the Soviet patriotism"* (SM, no.159, 11.07.89).

In 1989, street movements reached an unprecedented resurgence. Communication peaked, concrete actions were required *"time has come to move from words to deeds"* (TM, no. 98, 25.08.89), *"let us affirm the restructuration through facts"*, *"fight for their approval* [of the draft laws on the state language] *and "fulfil them"* (TM, no.98, 25.08.89). The passionate discussions from the social environment moved to parliament; *"This session[9] showed us that the session is not a literary club"*. Although *"laws contain compromises and shortcomings"* (TM, no. 98, 08.25.89), it was necessary to reconcile – *"haggling time has passed"*.

These counter-values, perceived as significant by a social group, but threatening by another, can be considered as constitutive elements of the polemic representational process. The national movement (for some *"national"*,

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[6] *Interfront* – a political entity formed by the representatives of ethnic minorities (Russians, Ukrainians, Gagauzians etc., mainly the Russian-speaking population) who opposed to the independence of the Republic of Moldova and pleaded for the preservation of the USSR.

[7] *Popular Front* – a sociopolitical movement in the ex-MSSR and in the first years of independence that pleaded for the national emancipation of the local population.

[8] The results of a study note the increasing social distance between Moldovans (Romanians) and other minority communities in the early '90s in regard to national issues. While more than 50% of Moldovans (Romanians) believed that ethnic minority rights are respected, only 17% of ethnic minorities members shared that opinion. (as cited by W. Crowther, Politics and the post-communist Transition in Moldova. In: *Nationalities Papers,* 1998, vol.26, no.1, p.152).

[9] The 13th Supreme Soviet of MSSR's session, 11th legislature, which voted the Language Law.

whereas for others simply *"nationalistic"* and *"anti-Soviet"*) determined the confrontation of two representational messages (nationalism and socialist ideology). Although the *"national revival"* discourse revolved around *perestroika* process, the meetings were treated as *"nationalistic"*. Nevertheless, nationalism in the context of socialist internationalism being considered of bourgeois origin, opposed to Soviet and Leninist principles – *"cohesion* [is required] *(...) upon the principles of national equity, friendship and socialist humanism, this is the task dictated by the new circumstances"* (SM, no.159, 11.07.89).

The genesis of national movement representation occurred in a context that still retained past ideological characteristics in terms of discourse and social practices. The emergence of restructuration reforms triggered a process of excessive thematization in the mass media. In the beginning, this process did not create contradictions, because the new representation about *perestroika* and *glasnost* was subscribed to *socialist ideology*. In the beginning of *perestroika*, the official discourse (but also the private one), even if it was change-oriented, was thematized in the framework of the typical wooden language, so that the new *emancipated representation* (the representation about *perestroika* reform) would not challenge the *hegemonic* one (that of socialist ideology). Social conflict escalated when a group of intellectuals engaged more actively with identity and independence issues and their *polemic representation* opposed the *hegemonic* one. Thus, the topic of collective actions became sensitive only when its polemic aspects, which did not fit the hegemonic ideology, had been rejected completely (protesters were called *"nationalists",* and even *"fascists"*; their street manifestations were labelled as *"extremist"*, contrary to what they called *"freedom", "democracy"* and *"national values"*). The representation of collective actions overlapped with the representation of nationalism and so, two tendencies confronted in the representation's emergence, which in the social imaginary of Soviet citizens excluded each other: *nationalism* and *socialism*.

Speaking about past polemic issues

The research interview, as any instance of communication, presents itself as a situation of social influences [14], it matters to *whom* you address since the perceived audience dictates a certain manner of speech [15]. Above all, interviews consist of human interactions and both the hypotheses and the research object are constructed namely through this type of confrontation with the problem *in situ* – "a comprehensive interview reverses the phases of object construction, fieldwork is no longer an instance of the pre-existing scheme of research analysis, but the starting point of the questioning" [16].

As "social representations are determined by the subjective experience and the social interactions in which every person elaborates their own representation" [17], the elements of representations are structured by means of these experiences, or to be more precise, "the experiences perpetuate in us under the form of the representations by which they are expressed" [18]. In this way, we speak about *felt* representations, in which the affective side (profound emotional involvement, participation, engagement etc.) is central and dominant. These representations rely both on the direct experience of the actors and their perception of this experience. As a result, the representation is *re*-experienced in relation with imagined *Other,* by means of the discourse produced by subjects during the interview. We aimed to reveal the interpretations given by interlocutors to events, their *a posteriori* representations upon meetings, as well as the links between representations and various affective investments[10]. For that reason, the interviewed persons have been selected from those who, due to their social status, have the duty to reflect continuously upon the social change, to make a personal point and to fight for some ideals and beliefs. Therefore, the selection criteria consisted in personal experience of the events and closeness to the research object. By *experience* we mean a subjective one, *felt* by people as participants or witnesses of the protest events. *Closeness* was determined by active participation, but also cognitive or emotional involvement afterwards. [11]

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[10] The interview guide covered the following topics: (1) the triggering event (e.g. how did the national revival come about, what was the discovery or change in understanding that propelled the street demonstrations?); (2) analysis of crowd, participants' profiles (e.g. who were the participants, how did the mass assembly form and organize?); (3) interpersonal relationships within the crowd; (4) relationships with authorities and police (e.g. how did the authorities and police react in the beginning and throughout the protests?); (5) goals and expectations; (6) protest evolution, assessments of future dynamics and developments, factors that contributed to its perpetuation; (7) post-factum emotions and representations.

[11] I have conducted 22 interviews with supporters of the national movement (students, teachers, writers, journalists or members of social movements), trying to detect the way this period is remembered and highlight the various stances of Alter Ego in the speeches and post-factum evaluations of the events.

A first hint about my interviewee's convictions would be revealed when we had set the date and place of meeting. Most of them suggested meeting in places with symbolic and emotional resonances for the events from 1989. In terms of Halbwach's collective memory theory [19], places, time and customs have the role of organization and re-organization of collective memory and discussion about these events must take place in and be associated specifically with those places. After the 1989s events, meeting again in these spaces on various national celebrations helped to preserve the spatiality of the idealized past.

From the outset, I asked my interviewees to think of themselves back in that period, insisting on the place, time, people, feelings and reactions, asking them to *re-construct* experiences related to the meetings which they witnessed or actively participated in. Most of them recalled the fever of those days, the ideal that prefigured gradually from the meetings and the supreme cause which needs to be carried on even in the present moment. Mentioning that period triggered specific emotional reactions. One woman's eyes teared immediately: *"it was beautiful"*, she said, adding that it was very pleasant to remember those times. This first reaction pointed to what we can call the therapeutic function of the biographic conversations, through the effort of remembering [20]. In his view, this function brings narration closer to the psychoanalytic cure. Similarly, one of the interviewees would even conclude with amazement: *"you let me speak on and on…"* and then *"but it was quite delightful to remember those times"*.

As the present research deals with a polemic representation, one should consider it is natural not to speak to anyone and anywhere what we think about a sensitive topic. The discourse on sensitive issues, such as the 1989 events, most often is not produced linearly; it takes time and a particular type of interaction. The social representation of collective meetings is characterized by a *manifest* content (acceptable for any situation, which does not cause dissension and conflict between Ego and Alter) and a *latent* content which is obscured and decoded only in certain types of interaction. Within this context, when looking into the social representation of certain objects, one needs to scrutinize the *way* individuals speak about this object of representation in front of the imagined *Other* (in this case, the researcher). The type of interaction between the researcher and the interviewed person is always reflected in the production of narratives. From this point of view, I could discern two types of speeches: *ex abrupto* and *prudent* discourses.

Ex abrupto discourse. In this case, it was enough to launch some reference points of discussion that the interlocutor would set off promptly, without any introduction, advancing directly in the middle of events stocked in memory. The narrator assumed from the outset the *innocence* of their listener. They would interrupt regularly their speech to add notes or to give details in order to facilitate the adequate reception of information. They claimed their role of "privileged witness of the events", as if history was made with their direct involvement. Without being directed, they would decide alone what to speak about, making by themselves the connection between their significant past, time of narration and the research topic. For them the retrospective narration unfolded *sui generis*, from a natural pure confessional tendency. There was no concrete "you" while speaking; the confession might have taken place anytime and in any context.

Prudent discourse. The interlocutor with a prudent discourse was always discrete and had reserves in offering too many details. The confession would take place slowly; the subject of recollection was approached bit by bit as an external consumed fact. These interlocutors were cautious because they could not discern my own position regarding the topic of discussion – opposition or adherence? That is why in the beginning the thematization was often not obvious as these participants would attempt to align with a general tendency, perceived by them more acceptable. Some of them refused to dwell on some aspects, arguing that no further information was needed, because *"it is already known"*. The description was detached, sometimes abstracted from the immediate, personal context, focused on general events and their evolution and impact.

Narrative reconstructions of the '80s collective actions: *"how it happened…"*

As recounted in narratives, 1989 was a breathless and effervescent year. After having been denied elementary identity rights such as language, history, anthem, flag for a long time, Moldovans' discontent eventually broke out *"the world started to wake up and revolt"*. The national ideal slowly evinced through celebratory and ritual events. The existence of a latent conflict as well as the anticipation of change was reflected in the narratives *"when this all started, I honestly thought that our time arrived,* which rendered the prolonged waiting for an opportunity to step up and demand their rights.

The national revival movement from the late '80s belongs to an affective stratum which is particularly sensitive. By recalling those times, the narrator ascends to an idealized space, which seems so well protected

and powerful that it should naturally belong, in terms of social representation, to the elements of *central nucleus.* These experiences – structured as flash memories – are recounted in great detail and with high emotional intensity. Yet through the mere passage of time, this strongly emotionally charged node lost its glow and became an ordinary social fact lacking its initial stake and relevance.

According to the narratives produced by my interlocutors, the participants assembled in various meetings by virtue of freedoms that they could not afford *"before"* (until perestroika), these meetings taking the form of emotionally and symbolically loaded ceremonial rituals – *"we would gather at rallies, organize literary meetings with candles in the student dormitory, recite poems and play Romanian songs"*. The very idea of discontent and protest was gradually replaced by the joy of meeting *"we felt we were heroes to some extent, by simply trying to rebuff brazen authorities"*, and spiritual communion between individuals who shared the same ideas and values. Participants almost "forgot" the trigger of the uprising, their initial negative emotions being alleviated by this very symbolic award. The change they claimed, before being implemented, had occurred at symbolic and ritual levels, so that individuals might have even felt that the protest was already pointless.

However, *"the winds of change"* collided with the conservative forces. Two antagonistic groups confronted each other: the *"reformers"*, promoting social change favoured by circumstances and tributaries to the *"old regime"*, rather conservative, resistant, but also uncomfortable with the growing influence of the another. Harshly criticized in the Russian press, and praised in the Romanian language one, these meetings aroused growing interest of more people to join: *"I remember the meetings of Mateevici cenacle – a wooden ramp assembled hastily in the middle of the lane,* [where] *speakers succeeded each other absolutely spontaneously. It was actually like a Hyde Park: going up on that stage, reciting patriotic poems, or a manifest, a proclamation, a call…"* The opportunity to talk about the long repressed national history and the Romanian language caused the opportunity of mystical happiness, it made newcomers feel they attended an event which surpassed the limits of ordinary and legality *"there was this enthusiasm (...) very contagious, I felt that something was floating in the air, that we are accomplices in a great kabbalah."* The meetings in the Green Theatre deliberately followed a ritualistic scheme, consisting of a series of symbolic moments: the anthem and other patriotic songs marked the start and the end of meetings.

These meetings turned into mass scale movements almost spontaneously. One of them, which occurred significantly on Lenin's death day, marked the beginning of the collective movements. The state of emergency imposed general mobilization: *"How could I stay at home? If not me, if not you, who else?"* The image of a spontaneous and unorganized protesting crowd transpired from the interviews. The participants engaged in the protest movement without any external pressure. The decision to attend the meetings came naturally, unprovoked since no announcements about the date and place of the *"socio-historical and cultural manifestations"* were published in the mass media, no specific mobilization or propaganda in favour of the new reformist trend was made. Instead, a general sense of complicity was instituted. The participants would convene even under precarious weather conditions and despite bad climate, some meetings lasted for hours *"we dressed well, stood four hours, and none of us was bored at all!"* Some interviewees specified that the positive energy kept them on the streets *"at the end of March a few dozens of tents were installed although it was extremely cold"*.

Spirits were incensed in the square, there was a general emotional effusion. Interviewees referred repeatedly to the monumental image of the growing crowd, *"waves of people started coming"*, describing with excitement the unique and unrepeatable atmosphere of frenzy and enthusiasm: *"I've never seen anything like it, as if it were a sea of people…"* A collective identity of solidarity is instilled: *"we were all brothers, everyone basically embraced everyone"*. The very fact that they were in the same place for the same cause was a reason of instant affiliation. By being partakers of the same creed, communication was easy. The state of continued excitement and agitation came as natural for the masses: *"We put so much soul, stood breathless, waiting for the verdict* [adoption of linguistic legislation]*"*. People felt more secure in the square than at their private residences (*"I could not stay at home")*, believing it would be easier to obtain updates from authorized sources. In the meantime, until further elucidations, different assumptions were built and new developments were imagined.

All participants were integrated into a monochrome picture *"everyone was singing"*. As the demonstrators grew significantly in number, a strained waiting seized the crowd *"we expected someone to come out and tell us something. We were so anxious about what was happening there* [during the parliament sessions]*"*. References are made to a collective *"we"*: mutual help, solidarities, unifying dynamics. The entire crowd can be likened to a *"besieged fortress"* (E.Canetti). The threat came from outside – the authorities who opposed the change,

but also from inside *"surely security agents swarmed through the crowd"*. The threat was acknowledged, but did not represent a danger anymore, being even ridiculed: *"they* [security agents] *were in a state of expectation too, doing their job, rigorously taking notes, microphones were placed everywhere…"*

The Central Square [PMAN] represents a consecrated *topos*, a geometric meeting point. The strong sense of belonging and attachment for this place, prompted the demonstrators to defend it from being occupied with adverse events: *"the square is ours; we will not give it to them!"* (an interviewee referring to an attempt by Interfront members to hold one of the rallies in the Square). Even if it were a public space which could be accessed by everyone, this meeting point was not only protected from intruders but also displayed features of a compensatory space in which actors bound by exceptional values took refuge from an unsatisfying reality *"this was our spiritual Mecca"*.

The moment of independence is recalled with difficulty, given the *"ambiguous feeling"*, tied with a mixture of *"joy and anxiety",* experienced by the residents of the newly established republic, faced with an imminent coup.[12] The coup was perceived as *"an attempt to bottleneck democracy"* which *"poured some plumb in our veins (...) On the night of 20 to 21 August* [the days of the Moscow putsch], *a movie was on TV and the film was stopped and there was a generic screen – special edition in which M. Snegur* [the first president of the republic] *appealed, looking visibly excited, saying that the revolution is in danger…"* The information void from those days was a breeding ground for spreading rumours *"no one knew what was happening, it was said that the deputies were locked in the Supreme Council, that decisions would be made, that some very important proclamations would be drawn."* And, finally, victory of the democratic forces was met with frantic exhilaration *"people really embraced, kissed, like during the Romanian Revolution".* The unification with Romania was perceived by some as the ultimate desideratum, the final stage of the national emancipation movement: *"A rally was convened in the Cathedral Square, where even unification was requested (...), union with Romania would have been fit to these expectations".*

Post factum evaluations: between resignation and militancy

Regarding present evaluations of the 1989 events in the light of recent political developments, four categories of discourses could be identified in the narrations: *resigning discourse, idealist-romantic discourse, militant discourse* and *academic discourse.* These categories were identified taking into consideration the interpretative repertoires which emerged regularly and represented the prevailing feature of the discourse. As mentioned earlier, the level of implication in discourse depends on the closeness and distance from the object (for instance strong engagement in the idealist-romantic and militant discourse, or detachment, in the academic and resigning discourses).

Resigning discourse. The production of resigning discourse is tightly linked with the events that followed '89. The movement of national emancipation is presented as a mixture of contradictions, hopes, disappointments, *"deviations"* and especially, *"betrayals"*. The narrators use the events in course (Transnistrian conflict, the return of the Communist Party to power in 2001 and their politics of re-sovietization) as resources for re-interpretation of both past and present actions. They cannot see the utility of protest movements and thus are predisposed to offer historical details and speak from the third person position as if they deliberately aspired to an objective detachment from the act of narration and from those events. The events of '89 belong to a *"faraway"* past, fixed in *illo tempore*, enveloped in myth and legend. For them, events were parts of a scenario that would have taken place irrespective of their participation.

Idealist romantic discourse. The interlocutors with the idealist romantic discourse are emotionally involved in the narrative act, speak from the first-person position, and feel the need to invoke justifying arguments *"we were young, enthusiast…", "we did believe… for real"*, as if they want to reinforce the motivation for participation in front of a potentially sceptical *Other*. Positive assessments prevail. These speakers interrupt their speech at intervals to repeat: *"it was simply wonderful…"* The narration is dominated by sympathetic emotions generated by solidarity and collective euphoria. Participants describe themselves as being those from *"the streets, melted in the masses called towards a free life"*. They speak about their spiritual elevation, the general atmosphere of the manifestations, describing the monumental picture of the revolted crowd.

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[12] The August Coup (19-21 August 1991) was an attempt to take control over the Soviet Union by some lead members of the Soviet central committee, who did not support the new reforms initiated by M.Gorbachev. The MSSR was among the few ex-Soviet republics which openly opposed resistance.

Militant discourse. The persons who had a militant discourse attempted to present their actions as explainable and intelligible to those who might not understand or appreciate them. Their discourse seems to be oriented towards the deconstruction of some devalued representations of the imagined *Others*. The central dimension of this discourse is the same as in the case of the resigning discourse, the protests' outcome, but, unlike the last one, the militant discourse is focused on the ongoing necessity of protest. After the enthusiasm of the '90s, the national movement decreased in intensity and a general scepticism took over the public space reinforced by the repeated failures of the following protest movements. Yet, militancy could not be devalued totally in the public eye, not until the ideals were realized and the mission was complete. Interviewees with a militant discourse felt the urge to argue against the collective anomie that seems to have seized the Moldovan society ever since, insisting on the unfinished struggle that should be carried on no matter what.

Academic discourse. In this discourse, the story has a less *cathartic* role; it is less of an internal necessity than a possibility to re-discuss the topic, to revise their personal analytical view concerning it and to emit explanations. This type of speech is characteristic to those who tend to explain historic phenomena and present events in a chronological way rather than referring to their personal experience, in a detached and impersonal manner, if not even patronizing. When asked to describe the interval of 1988-1989, they would typically lay out an insightful overview of the events that preceded this period, including the factors that incentivized the protests in Moldova in comparison with other ex-Soviet republics. Historical data, scientific truth, objectivity, precision in the approach of events are the dimensions that this type of discourse revolves around.

Conclusions: a representation that still remain *polemic*

While looking into the social representation of the national movement from '88-89, we have observed that it is not a common and neutral object of representation, but one in which different conflictual aspects interfere. Because of its particular sensitivity, access to its representational content is rather problematic, because only bringing them into discussion gives rise to tensions. An object of representation becomes conflicting for social actors when their own representation encounters an incompatible reality and turns into an intolerable issue that is deliberately avoided and not thematized about[13]. As a rule, the reason why sensitive objects are not being discussed, at least in the public sphere, is because it is believed that consensus cannot be reached. In this case, usually the non-consensual aspects of the representation are camouflaged and people resort to clichés of public discourse shared by others only to disguise their true social representations.

The national movement generated divisions between "us" and other ethnic groups which did not share these ideals or furthermore, perceived them as threatening to their group identity. Although Moldova was one of the Soviet republics that had a strong national movement in the early '90s, it went into swift decline in the early years of independence. Thus, the events of '89s are seen as a scenario that was not been performed to the end, a project that was hijacked by uncontrollable political developments. Moldovans' failed transition is blamed on disruptive events such the Transdniestrian war, Gagauz movement in the south and the economic recession. For some, these events and popular movements should have culminated into natural unification with Romania and European integration. Like an unresolved conflict, the "unfinished dossier of 1991" recurs cyclically whenever certain political decisions bring forward national issues.

Protest in Moldova appears to be recurrent. At the root of social conflict and protests that followed independence there were three main themes, namely identity, language, and history – these being present both at the level of political and academic discourse and at the level of daily conversations. After independence, almost all protests, meant to be only instrumental in the beginning (e.g. preventing the adoption of certain decisions deemed unjust), transformed gradually into ritual protests in which the expressive function plays a more significant role. Two elements are distinguishable in the construction of the social representation of '80s collective actions. On the one hand, the changed meaning given to public meetings: they were not only an occasion to praise the communist power anymore, but an instrument of opposition. On the other hand, the intensification of discussions about identity divided the discourses into two parallel universes. In '89, the social communication reached the apogee and became polemic, disturbing and contradictory, and disputes were perceived as irreconcilable. This oppositional intergroup dynamic shaped the polemic character of the representation of collective

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[13] As I.Marková (2003) writes about an extreme case of thematization or absence of thematization may refer to the situations when an expression or a sentence becomes unspeakable for the fear of the effect it might produce.

actions since its inception, as the imagined *Other* played a crucial role in its justification. The social representation was articulated also by the subjective experiences of participants and by the context in which it was produced. Thus, the elements of the representations were structured by means of these experiences and *re*-experienced through *ad hoc* discourse produced by my interlocutors during interviews.

After the enthusiasm of the '90s, the national movement declined and militancy subsided. Memories of that period linked with the subsequent events are framed between resignation and militancy. Two interpretative repertoires, seemingly contradictory, go together in the post factum evaluations: *betrayal-passivity* and *fight-continuity*. When referring to the current period, respondents frequently invoke the diminution of their past ideal and increased difficulty to mobilize masses again under the existing conditions. Yet, the persistent tension of an unconsumed conflict lingers, and the polemic nature of those events remains polemic.

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Prezentat la 22.10.2020