

The Social Representations of Migration and Their Relationship to Psychological Alienation and Identity Formation among the Algerian Elite: A Socio-Psychological Approach

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Abstract

Migration remains the most complex social phenomenon, bringing predominance to many features- economic, political, and cultural attributes. However, adopting a social-psychology approach does render the phenomenon easy to understand. It would bring to light the forms of thought and the images formed in collective consciousness. The research in question will be to study such social representations on migration which the Algerian elite has through a socio-psychological lens illuminating how notions of identity, belonging, and recognition are reflected in psychological attitudes and justifications with which migration is viewed.

Additionally, the paper aims at highlighting how the representations are built on elite consciousness, and the contradictions in them regarding individual dreams and national belonging, and between competence values and loyalty to the homeland. The analysis draws on key concepts in social psychology: social identity, cognitive dissonance, social comparison, and stereotypes.

Keywords: Social representations, Algerian elite, migration, social psychology, identity, cognitive dissonance.

INTRODUCTION

The world increasingly becomes an inseparable tangle of material variables, social ties, and life situations-factors into which human beings live. In this complex weave of events and utterances, individuals are always busy interrogating their meanings, significance, and their own selves in them. This is because there is a cognitive and psychological need of understanding and control, especially regarding unfamiliar phenomena or phenomena locked in ambiguity and deprivation of information and people are "convinced" to interpreting it and trying to make sense in more favorable ways to the adaptation of understanding because it therapeutically controls behavior. In this sense, interaction between the material and the mental constitutes a perception, which would unfold with the different psychological, social, and historical dimensions. This is called social representation, in which an individual organizes and interprets and adapts reality.

These social representations are primarily both founded on the psychological need for controlling and orientating within the world of reference and on social belonging and communication needs. Thus, through an interaction of the self and the other, what emerges is a common system of meaning that will allow a group to integrate its perception of reality. The individual does not exist in isolation from society, but she participates with the society to build this social reality through her interaction and communication-whether in contexts of harmony or conflict-with the result that collective mental images come into being which express collective consciousness and guide social behavior.

In this light, the elite of Algeria are fundamental and central to public discourse or to the influence of collective opinion because of their intellectual and symbolic authority in society. Hence, analysis of the elite's attitudes toward migration cannot be understood just through sociology-only but with a more rigorous and closer view into the psychological and social structures that shape their perception and interpretation of the phenomenon. For the Algerian elite, migration evokes two opposite extremes of meaning: on the one hand, it somehow bespeaks the ambitions or self-actualization, with promises for a kind of stretching room toward freedom and creativity. On the

other, it signifies a kind of vague sensation of emotional distance or guilt towards the homeland.

Thus, the specific research concern here is in the analysis of social representations of migration among Algerian elite with regard to the social psychology which promotes cognitive and emotional factors that can help explain elite awareness of the phenomenon. The aim would be to bring about the revelation of the symbolic and cognitive, which defines their perceptions of migration, and would help gain a richer comprehension of their relationship with homeland, belonging and identity against the background of social transformation currently undergoing in modern Algeria.

1. The Evolution of the Concept of Social Representations

1.1. The Sociological Perspective

Sociological definitions of social representations stem from the idea of collective representations given by Émile Durkheim more than a century ago. With the social group being the fundamental unit of sociology, it was natural for Durkheim to base his conception of representations on this premise. Durkheim, very often considered the father of French sociology, devoted his massively influential 1897 work, *Le Suicide* (Suicide), to the scientific and objective study of social phenomena (Boukhtefia, 2000, p. 60).

The concept of collective representation was first introduced in 1859 by Durkheim. He drew a line between individual and collective conception. He offered a more elaborate explanation in an article published in 1898 on metaphysics and morality, where he underscored that social representations do not belong to the individual consciousnesses, but are products of society that have been imposed from the outside upon the individual. He insisted that social reality should be represented and studied as a social construct rather than just reducing it to the objective or material aspects (Boukhtefia, 2000, p. 61).

1.2. The Social-Psychological Perspective

The collective representations concept concerns social groups that are large and quite stable. As far as social psychology is concerned, through the works of Serge Moscovici, this field has introduced a completely different concept: social representations (*les représentations sociales*).

A social representation includes three basic elements (Moscovici):

- Diffusion
- Production
- Function

Moscovici says that a representation is considered social when it is commonly held by a group of people, thus it is widely dispersed. It becomes social when it has been formed in mutual communicative process and is functional in social exchanges and collective behavior (Gilly, 1990, p. 66).

2. The Concept of Representation

2.1. Representation and Social Representations (Linguistically and Terminologically)

The earliest etymology in a much wider perspective is that of the root verb ***mathala*** within the linguistic frame of representation (the Arabic term was ***at-tamathul***). ***Mathala*** has its root meanings in the definition of the verbal root as one involving depiction, resemblance, and manifestation in form. The meaning of the word ***tamaththul*** on Ibn Manẓūr's *Lisān al-‘Arab* is that "it has become so clear to the eye that one is able to behold it," while ***amtalahu*** implies that "it is imagined or conceived." Thus, the expression ***tamthīl al-shay’ bi-l-shay’*** means that one thing is compared or analogized with another as in the prophetic tradition: "I saw Paradise and Hell represented before me on the wall of the ***qibla***," meaning visibly depicted. Similarly, ***Al-Mu’jam aṣ-Ṣāfi*** defines ***tamaththul*** portions as "to portray something as if it were visible," that is to make an idea or mental image perceptible or tangible.

In the Larousse dictionary, the definition of "représentation" is in effect, a performance or artistic display as referring to or being representative of concrete objects or persons, often within a symbolic, legal, or intellectual

framework. As said in the Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, representations refer to those ways in which images and texts reconstruct the reality which they signify instead of reflecting it. Human consciousness has possessions of experiences, images, and attitudes that are resuscitated under similar circumstances; hence, a process of recall and reworking lived experience occurred mentally and in experience.

Émile Durkheim, for instance, could give an almost foundational definition of social representations in sociology, which defined social representations as "forms of collective conception emerging among individuals in society and representing the system of values and norms that constitutes the proper vision of their world as well as modes of thinking and behavior". He further added that such representations were culturally different within individuals as well as their intellectual and emotional dispositions. Such views are not purely individual perceptions but collective phenomena and at the last, the symbolic currents that dominate society structure collective consciousness. As he observed, "Representations are a continuous flow of life images, pushing one another forward like the current of a river-never static; always evolving with social life."

On this basis, social representation can be defined operationally as attitudes which shape the perception of people about the world and themselves, configured into behavior and beliefs according to the cultural social values acquired. Thus, these representations are flexible and able to change with new contexts of social culture (Boussaha, Azzouz, 2008, 72).

2.2. The General Concept of Representation and Social Representations

Representation has been conceptualized differently by researchers, giving various meanings to this analytical tool, which is complex and multifaceted. Although the studies on the concepts are quite many, the idea of social representation has remained rather vague because, along with conceptual complexity and multidimensionality, it covers discipline after discipline, scientific field through social movements, describing everything from individual behavior to collective processes (Delouvée & Rateau, 2016, p. 52)

Historically, social representations have been part and parcel of psychology, sociology, and anthropology. However, until recently, they were left mostly ignored until Serge Moscovici revived them by breathing new life into them and widening the scope in terms of subject matter and areas of application.

It is the multiplicity of interpretations of this concept which makes it analytically powerful. Hence, it is quite complex in its mechanisms and structure, besides the variety of its purposes and applications.

From here, we must take the general notion of representation up to the specification of the social representations themselves and the definitions put forth in the literature (Djelloul & Bekkouch Djamaoui, 2014, p.53).

The term is derived from the Latin *repraesentare*, which corresponds in Arabic to *tasawwur* or *tamaththul*, meaning to make something present, as in the mind, or to bring forth some mental image.

In philosophical dictionaries, it is defined as "anything which can be conceived by thought." While, according to psychological dictionaries, it is defined as "the mental recall of images within a cognitive framework aimed at interpreting a situation or series of situations within the individual's lived world" (Ameur, n.d., p. 66).

2.3 Selected Definitions of the Concept of Representation

The introduction and development of the concept of *representation* owe much to the contributions of several philosophers and scholars, most notably Émile Durkheim and Serge Moscovici.

- **Émile Durkheim's Definition**

Émile Durkheim (1898) was concerned to capture the act of representing (*représentation*) in a social framework that would enable him to point up the characteristic difference between collective and individual thought, as follows:

Because of these specific qualitative properties, social conceptions are phenomena other than the natural ones. Undoubtedly, there are certain causes for them, but these in turn serve as causes for other phenomena: For the

production of representations is not merely from ideas occupying individuals' minds, but from what remains of our past life-acquired habits, preconceived judgments, and unconscious inclinations. They are, in short, everything that makes up our moral character.

From this, we can deduce that representations go beyond the immediate thoughts in one's mind. They embrace as well all those experiences, ideas, and values long since accrued and profoundly rooted in one's consciousness and linked to the wider social and cultural environment- (Abu Hweij, 2006, p. 84).

- **Serge Moscovici's Definition**

Serge Moscovici revitalized the concept and everyone made it fresher epistemologically through his seminal, 1961, work *Psychoanalysis: Its Image and Its Public*. Thus, according to Moscovici:

Representation is the re-presentation of an object in consciousness in so far as it cannot be apprehended in the material world; this makes it both an abstract and a cognitive process.

Representing for Moscovici is an operation, and it is quite complex. This is by bringing again what was absent-in consciousness-an object by way of an image, symbol, or sign that makes it present mentally but absent physically. He also explained representation "reintroducing the object or entity into the consciousness so as to be present once more in awareness, although it is not. Thus, representation works as a mental device for the revival of meaning and reality reconstruction within the mind."

Also, representation, is invoked by Moscovici, as a screen to transfer, in each instance fished out by memory those most appropriate images and meanings to the subject and dynamically reorganized to meet both individual and collective needs (Abu Hweij, 2006, p. 85).

3. The Concept of Migration (Linguistically and Terminologically)

Linguistically, migration (*al-hijra*) means leaving or departing. According to *Lisān al- 'Arab*, its root meaning is "to move from one land to another". Among the Arabs, the term *al-muhājir* originally referred to a

Bedouin who left the desert for the cities. The term came to connote being moved away from, or neglected something over time, with thus "***hajara shay'an***" meaning "to ***abandon*** or neglect something." The word also indicates alienation and mobility in search of livelihood, knowledge, healing or any other form of benefit.

In fact, in the Qur'an, the concept has both spatial and intentional dimensions whereby we have the verse: "And whoever migrates for the sake of Allah will find on earth many places of refuge and abundance. And whoever leaves his home, migrating to Allah and His Messenger, and then death overtakes him, his reward has already been secured with Allah."(An-Nisaa', 4:100)

Hence, migration means not only physical relocation but also a purposeful transformation towards a better state.

Migration is movement of an individual or group from one location, either within a country or beyond borders, to another for one or more reasons, in terms of economic-disadvantage, social, political, or security reasons. Its further forms vary by terms of regulation:

- Legal migration is usually defined as migration taking place in compliance with the national or international laws regulating entry and residence.
- Irregular or illegal migration entails movement out of all law regulations, without official permission.

Abdelmalek Sayad always said research on migration would not be to limit itself to the act only, but also to take into account what he calls "the trajectory": i.e., the entire set of transformations undergone by the migrant in relation to both the society of origin and the one of settlement. Migration for him is not just a movement across a static space; it renders passage across a social field that is inherently dynamic in nature, which characters its own evolving identity.

He too defined migration: "This is the movement of one or more persons from a given place to another, whether inside a country and its borders or outside them, in a way that has a clear and explicit purpose, whether forced or voluntary, temporary or permanent".

Operationally, migration would represent a process of relocation undertaken by individuals or groups in search of better living or social, or even psychological conditions. It, hence, answers material and symbolic needs at a time (Ameur, p. 64).

4. The Concept of “Elite”: Linguistic and Terminological Perspectives

The Arabic verb "*nakhaba*," meaning "*to choose*" or "*to select*," is the basis of the term elite. The word in its original sense applies to a small and distinguished group, standing apart from the majority owing to certain qualities, abilities, or functions. Thus "*nukhba al-qawm*" refers to the best and the most regarded ones of the people.

From a sociological point of view, the mention of "*elite*" has acquired a different sense in modern social thought, referring to individuals enjoying intellectual, political, or symbolic authority in society one way or another, either through their position, expertise, or influence over decision-making and ideological orientation.

The Italian sociologist Vilfredo Pareto defined the elites as the minority excelling in any field and holding positions of leadership or influence in society. Conducting a similar analysis, Raymond Aron would define elites as those who have the symbolic and cognitive instruments of influence, deciding on collective values and representing social aspirations.

In like vein, Pierre Bourdieu offered a structural reading of the elite along the social field: an agent possessing symbolic and cultural capital which permits him to impose his worldview and to control the production of dominant meanings and representations. The elite, therefore, is not defined just in terms of class position but of the socio-cultural context in which it frames collective consciousness and reproduces hegemonic culture.

In this study, the term Algerian elite shall operationally refer to any individual with a high level of scientific, engineering, cultural, or other types of training, and with the capacity to shape social and intellectual discourse regarding migration. Their perceptions mirror the societal social representations existing at large but with a higher level of analytical and critical awareness. This elite perceives quite differently social phenomena

through the prism of accumulated knowledge and live experience, hence interpreting migration not just as an economic act but rather as a symbolic and psychological phenomenon of expressing the tension between self and society (Djelloul & Bekkouch Djamaoui, 2014, p.53).

5. The Psychological Dimension of the Algerian Elite's Representations of Migration

5.1 Migration as a Symbol of Success and Self-Realization

In elite discourse, representations emerge that portray migration as a pathway to self-fulfillment and as a space for professional and scientific freedom that the individual lacks in their home country. This image is grounded in a cognitive drive toward achievement and competence, and is psychologically translated into a feeling of self-satisfaction or the realization of one's repressed potential.

This type of representation serves as a psychological defense against mounting frustration in the local ambiance and externalizes the causes of failure through an idealized image of "the other world." (Boussaha, 2008, p.96).

5.2 Migration as Psychological Loss and Separation

In contrast, a different section of the elite sees migration as having caused symbolic injury along a scalar continuum of loss of belonging-detachment from one's roots. It has a tremendous amount to do with a collective guilt toward the homeland, and thus paves the way for a kind of tension between emotional binding and the urge for freedom.

This duality in social psychology is seen as cognitive dissonance, wherein the person must now endure a conflict created within itself between contradicting beliefs: personal ambition versus national loyalty. (Abric, 2003, p.86).

5.3 Migration as a Strategy of Coping and Transcendence

Thirdly, migration is viewed as a strategy for survival or adaptive transcendence to avoid the agony of structural frustration. This perception is

justified socially; the elite individual seeing migration not so much as being unfaithful but as a rational adaptive choice in an unalterable reality.

In this regard, social representations alleviate the moral pressure arising from the contradiction between values and decisions, transforming justification into action, by allowing guilt to justify action, one social representation can act against another (Gilly,1990, p.92).

6. The Processes of Constructing Social Representations

To comprehend the theoretical dimensions of social representations, it is necessary to examine the two core processes proposed by Serge Moscovici (1961): Objectivation (*Objectivation*) and Anchoring (*Ancrage*).

6.1 The Process of Objectivation

The process of anchoring is a complex cognitive procedure that aims to organize the knowledge related to the object of representation by transforming abstract theoretical concepts into concrete, tangible images.

Objectivation, in the words of R. Farr, "makes self-evident that which could not be explained," while Doise observes that it turns the abstract into the perceptible and the relational into practical knowledge.

It unfolds within three main phases:

1. **Selection of Information:** deciding on those significant points from the new topic and rehashing them according to the values and norms of the group.
2. **Building the Figurative Core** (Central Nucleus): Framing the concept up as a whole and forming a coherent, even simpler, accessible and intelligible one.
3. **Transformation into a Naturalized Form:** Here, the image is denuded of any abstract aspect and becomes obvious in everyone's conscious reality, thus guiding perception, judgment, and action. (Yahiaoui, 2022, p.93).
- 4.

6.2 The Process of Anchoring

It involves introducing mental representations into the societal structure and becoming part of a collective, operational system into which it will fit in working with everyday reality.

Moscovici characterized anchoring as the transformation of subject into instrument embedded within the network of social relations.

Integration into existing cognitive systems was what Doise used to explain new knowledge and cited that such kinds of reference are used to classify so people, events, and things together. He defined the top three types of anchoring as:

1. **Value and Belief Integration:** embedding concepts such as equality or justice, which help actors interpret their social relations through group norms.
2. **Representation of Social Categories and Situations:** focusing on how individuals perceive social groups and contexts in their surroundings.
3. **Connection with Class and Social Position:** analyzing how representations relate to individuals' social status or class identity.

The significance of anchoring lies in its ability to bridge the psychological dimension of the individual with the social dimension of the group, by revealing how new objects are assimilated into existing cognitive frameworks.

For instance, in the social representation of *school knowledge*, subjects are often perceived merely as sets of information, without consideration of their historical, scientific, or moral significance, reflecting the nature of learners' relationship to knowledge itself (Ben Malouka, 2015, p.102).

7. Functions of Social Representations

Social representations perform a number of functional tasks that help in organizing intellectual and social life. Prominent among these are:

- **Cognitive Function:**

It helps individuals to make sense of and interpret reality within the framework of values and beliefs they hold. Moreover, it makes possible social communication and knowledge exchange within the group.

- **The identity function:**

This is helpful in defining the identity of the individual and group, protecting that identity through the construction of a positive self-image, and attaching this image to social references.

- **The Guiding Function:**

Besides directing social behavior and practices, it actually determines through shared expectations and collective perceptions among members of the group the kind of relationships and behavioral patterns of social action.

- **Regulatory Function:**

In that they organize social relations and control contacts with one another through behavioral and value-based norms accepted within the group, they regulate most of social relationships.

- **Interpretative Function:**

In other words, it allows reality to be interpreted and reconstructed mentally. It builds it as a cognitive object through which one could attain comprehension and explanation under the privileged social and epistemological frameworks by which it is produced (Boukhtoufia, 2000, p.103).

8. Dimensions of Social Representations

According to Serge Moscovici, social representations consist of three main dimensions: information, attitude, and the field of representation. (Ben Malouka, 2015, p.86).

8.1 Information

Information is the first pole in the construction of any social representation. It includes the set of knowledge and experience concerning the issue at stake, which may be learned either through direct experience or social interaction.

It is the quality and quantity of information that people depend on to organize their conception of the reality. The more accurate and comprehensive the information is, the clear and coherent will be the representation. On the contrary, scanty or unreliable information creates ambiguity, compelling individuals to forge supplementing concepts that fill the gaps in their mental image.

8.2 Attitude

An attitude can be defined as the evaluative orientation or stance that an individual adopts toward the subject, whether favorable or unfavorable. It is a fundamental dimension because it precedes the processing of information and influences how such information is interpreted and understood.

People do not passively process the information, but rather actively view parts of it that are consistent with their pre-attitudinal judgments. This dimension is crucial because it functions exactly to establish unity of group attitudes and to defend shared orientations, being, as such, the point of departure in the process of forming collective representations.

8.3 The Field of Representation

According to Moscovici (1972): "There exists a conceptual field that includes an ordered unity of elements expressed through a set of organized opinions."

This way, the field of representation acts as a structural framework that arranges hierarchically the various constituents of the represented object, bringing some aspects into focus while disregarding others according to parameters of norms and values held by the group.

This field, however, varies among groups, being accountable to the cultural and social background of the individuals.

Dimensions of Representation According to Kaës

Kaës gives an additional viewpoint about dimensions of representation in three intertwined levels, which he contemplated as psychological, cultural, and social.

- **Psychological Dimension**

The representation is here understood as a psychological operation of building reality through repeated representations. They establish a network, which enables the individual to interpret the world around. Thus, representation refers to the virtual re-creation of a reality in the individual, whereby an integrated mental image is developed with a linkage to former experiences or personal history.

- **Cultural Dimension**

Culture here relates that representation is a product of culture or, better still, a social-historical representation and never an independent construct. Thus, Kaës distinguishes two aspects within this dimension:

1. **Representation as a Cultural-Historical Product:** The representations are periodical and social conditions, including the prevailing ideologies, into which class structures in society combine.
2. **Representation as a Socially Expressed Cultural Product:** Every social group has its own beliefs, values, and symbols that structure its way of seeing action reality.

- **Social Dimension**

They're constructed in the connection with the web of social relations connecting the individual to society. By means of these relations, such internal representations cannot be formed without being induced or affected by the social environment.

It is the mediation of the social network within the cultural fabric that also guides the process of representation, allowing some aspects of reality to be adopted as defined while excluding others, depending on the social belonging and position of the individual within the group.

9. Factors of Migration

Human migration results from multiple interrelated factors, political, economic, social, and psychological, whether legal or irregular, all driven by the search for a better life. The main factors can be classified as follows (Boussaha, 2008, p.111):

9.1 Political Factor

The political element is one of the prevailing causes of migration. Many think their home countries no longer provide conditions or opportunities necessary for stable and dignified life.

International migration has been increasingly affected by political disorders, and many areas have started to witness large-scale displacements owing to wars, revolutions, or internal conflicts.

To these forced migrations, people have been driven out of their countries on grounds of insecurity and political instability, thus searching for safe havens for themselves and their families. Armed conflicts and foreign interventions have greatly disturbed the social and economic systems of many nations, with migration being the only viable mode of escape.

In recent years, women and children have also begun joining the migration flow in search of safety and welfare.

9.2 Economic Factor

Of course, the economy is one of the most potent driving forces for migration, which can be either local or international.

Differences in development levels and employment opportunities are so severe between sending and receiving countries that they act as the engine of a movement. Most migrant-sending countries have limited employment opportunities, as their economies are mostly based on natural resources or agriculture, which are both vulnerable to external factors-global market fluctuations and climatic instability.

Economic growth is weak and labor markets volatile, which push many young people to seek out better opportunities abroad, leading to a more secure and dignified living.

9.3 Psychological Factor

Different psychological factors considerably interact with social and economic conditions. All these contribute to the individual's feeling of powerlessness to fulfill personal needs and aspirations in their original society.

Man, longs for a new environment where he can not entirely, but even partially, realize himself and fulfill personal ambitions. The psychological factor of wanting a challenge or adventure is especially important to young people when decisions related to migration are being contemplated.

Social factors like unemployment, economic conditions, and rising costs of living further exacerbate the psychological factors, and migration thus serves as an escape from the current restricted reality toward a vision of hope for the future. Therefore, when deprivation rules one's economic and social existence, the psychological urges become stronger to seek safety, self-esteem, and self-fulfillment elsewhere.

9.4 Social Factor

Social issues constitute some of the primary reasons for migration. Restrictive policies which curtail freedom of thought and expression usually create conflicts within an individual, creating feelings of alienation and erosion of their self-confidence, as well as of their hope for a future in their homeland.

Weak civil society institutions and lack of spaces for recreation, training, and expression add to the social and psychological pressures that are particularly felt in young people who have no access to quality education or fair opportunities.

Furthermore, such states that fail to confront poverty, unemployment, and social ills leave these people feeling marginalized and entrapped,

prompting them to view their migration as an escape that would liberate them and fulfill their aspirations.

10. Psychological Factors Regulating Representations

10.1 Social Perception and Comparison

Studies in social psychology show that individuals tend to compare themselves with others to evaluate their social standing. For the elite, the migrant serves as a “**mirror**” for self-assessment: his success evokes feelings of pride or jealousy, while his failure justifies remaining in place.

This comparative process contributes to the reproduction of social stereotypes about migration and migrants, both positive and negative.

10.2 Psychological Justification and Cognitive Dissonance

Elites may also claim that they are facing a difficult dilemma, whether to migrate or to regret migrating. Such states of tension between conflicting beliefs or values have been identified by psychologists as cognitive dissonance, which often prompts individuals to seek internal justifications to resolve or reduce the inconsistency.

- Migration is a necessity, not a betrayal.
- The homeland does not offer equal opportunities.
- Returning later will allow me to contribute from abroad.

These kinds of logic are required for psychological consistency and maintaining symbolic attachment to motherland in face of behaviors potentially interpreted as contradictory.

10.3 Collective Emotions and Their Impact on Behavior

Pride, fear, hope, and guilt are just some of the various feelings that offer symbolic energy to the different attitudes towards migration.

The sense of pride in the success of Algerians who have made it abroad indicates an internally motivated, compensatory need regarding the shortcomings experienced locally. Guilt expresses emotional conflict between staying and leaving (Hendri, 2021, p.43).

11. Methodological Approaches to Studying the Content of Representations

Models, theories, and various measurement methods allow the researcher to study different social issues through social representation. Two main methodological questions arise when undertaking this type of research: (1) what method to use to collect representations, and (2) what method to use to analyze the data collected. There can be distinguished two wide-ranging approaches: interrogative methods and associative methods (Hendri, 2021, p.63).

Interrogative Methods

These methods rely on collecting verbal or visual expressions from individuals concerned with specific representations. Verbal expressions are the most commonly used.

a. Verbal Methods

Interview:

An interviewing technique that often adopts a semi-structured framework to allow free expression by subjects on topics pertinent to the research content. The interview can provide an opportunity for the investigation of the contents of social representation through participant discourse, although interviews yield partial views that are best complemented by the application of other techniques. In the words of Maurice Angers (1997), an interview is a qualitative technique conducted either individually or in groups for exploring behavior and attitudinal underpinnings.

Questionnaire:

For quantitative data on representations, the technique is the most preferred one. Questionnaires try to put knowledge organized in some way and clarify the general components that structure such representations. The questionnaire is a well-designed set of questions pertinent to the objectives of the study and relevant to the dimensions of the phenomenon concerned. The responses are in written form so that numerical comparison and general trends can be worked out.

b. Visual Methods

These are used when participants find it difficult to verbally express their representations. The most common techniques include:

Projective Plates (Inductive Boards):

Inspired by projective psychology (e.g., T.A.T. and Rorschach tests), this method involves presenting participants with images or drawings and asking them to interpret them freely.

Such interpretations reveal the latent content of their representations and uncover the symbolic meanings underlying their perceptions.

Associative Methods

These methods rely on spontaneous and rapid responses to words or symbols, in order to reach the deep, often unconscious content of representations.

Free Association

This technique consists of presenting a stimulus word (mot inducteur) to the participant, who is then asked to mention all the words or ideas that immediately come to mind.

According to Abric, this method allows the identification of the unconscious components of representations through the associative network of words. It also serves as a foundation for other related techniques such as:

- Associative Map (La carte associative)
- Bipolar or Paired Judgment (Le jugement bipolaire)
- Hierarchical Classification (Le classement hiérarchique séquentiel)

Associative Card or Mind Map (La carte mentale): Developed by H. Jaoui (1979), this technique is used after free association. Participants are asked to group the words they have generated into pairs, triplets, or quartets, revealing semantic connections and the conceptual structure of the representation.

Psychological and Social Questionnaires

In addition to these techniques, researchers may employ psychological and social scales to measure:

- Attitudes;
- Identity;
- Levels of cognitive dissonance;
- Perceptions of self and others.

These instruments make it possible to construct a representational map of migration within elite consciousness, linking the individual (psychological) level with the symbolic (social) one.

Conclusion

In short, social representation, in spite of the multiplicity of perspectives and theoretical approaches applied to it, constitutes a dynamic and constructive process in which the individuals in question interpret and organize realities of their daily lives: the psychological, social, and cultural.

The structural rigor and conceptual richness with which the notion of social representation is endowed make of it a broad field of research, fertile enough to observe the complex interactions that shape the social cloth, with the opportunity to observe a great many phenomena that are elusive to traditional methodologies.

In this paper, we try to underscore the importance and relevance of social representations in understanding migration among the Algerian elite, considering it a complex reality intertwining individual aspirations and collective belonging, social awareness and psychological motivations.

From a simple concept, social representation itself has now evolved into a broad analytical framework, allowing a better understanding of the interrelationship between thought and society on the one hand and between individual perception and cultural structure on the other.

Notwithstanding the diversity of approaches, this branch remains one of the richest and most multifaceted in the social sciences, giving valuable insight into the understanding of how individuals and groups position themselves toward major social issues such as migration, identity, and belonging.

Ultimately, the study concludes that social representations have become a central object in the human and social sciences, especially in social psychology, as they constitute forms of practical thinking aimed toward communication, understanding, and control of the environment through socially embedded cognitive and functional processes that express the depth and diversity of human experience.

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