The *nexus*, a form of affective polarization of social thinking in collective action

“Je suis Charlie”, a case study

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ELIETTE
ABECASSIS
Alyah

La tentation
du départ

Albin Michel
Paris Jan 2015, three terrorist attacks: do we remember all three?
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<tr>
<th>2015</th>
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Did the French society respond similarly when terrorism targeted different categories of victims?

- If a **hierarchy** exists, then the society responds **less unanimously** to killings targeting some categories, rather than others.

- The notion of **nexus** can reveal an implicit hierarchy in victimhood.

- The **mobilisation** in France after the terrorist attacks in Paris in January 2015 illustrates a difference.

- **Level of analysis** (Doise, 1982): society
The notion of Nexus (Rouquette, 1994)

- Introduced to interpret (≠ explain) strongly affective collective action

- Opinions, stands, propaganda, collective responses show that at given times **some terms** act as **nuclei of affective sense** that a given community activates **before even reasoning**

- Nexus ≠ Social representation
  - Nexuses merge affect and cognition ("nexus"), are not organized as a "structure" (SR are)
  - Nexuses do not allow polemic views (SR do)
  - Nexuses mobilise a society in its whole, beyond intergroup differences (SR maintain intergroup differences)
Nexuses: «prelogical affective knots» (Rouquette, 1994)

- 6 properties

- Collectively shared by a society in its whole
- Mask intra- AND intergroup differences, even for a short time
- They are the mobilising form of an ideology
- They name not a “reality” but the social imaginary (cf also Klandermans, 1997; Postmes, Branscombe, Spears, & Young, 1999; van Zomeren, Postmes, Spears, 2008)
- They are signified by a single exhaustive label (homeland≠country)
- Rhetorically emphatic
Authentication of Nexus: its ability to mobilise crowds
Online response
Chart 1. The **timing** of the *collective affective response* (% “Shared” posts) on the Facebook page “Soutien à Charlie Hebdo”.
Chart 2. The **timing** of the **collective affective response** (% “Shared” posts) on the Facebook page “Soutien à Charlie Hebdo et à la liberté d’expression”. 
Nexus: authenticated in both cases?

NO

YES
JE NE SUIS PAS CHARLIE
JE SUIS MUSULMAIN
PAS TERRORISTE

JE NE
SUIS
CHARLISRAEL
Levels of analysis in social psychology
Doise (1982)

- **Intra-individual** level: intra-personal processes (personality, cognition...)

- **Inter-individual & situational** processes (game theory, attribution theory...)

- **Positional** level: differences in the social position that exist prior to the interaction, i.e., membership in social groups outside the experiment; (attributions in intergroup context, social representations)

- **Ideological** level: societal ideologies (belief in a just world; « prestige of science » in Milgram’s experiments)
Tweets & retweets by language, % (Smyrnaïos & Ratinaud, 2015)