

Special Issue Editorial: 11th International Conference on Social Representations, Évora, 2012

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In June 2012, the magnificent city of Évora in Portugal hosted the 11th *International Conference on Social Representations*. With several hundred oral and poster presentations, the conference demonstrated once again the scientific liveliness and attractiveness of social representations theory, both in Europe and Latin America. The conference was also memorable because of its perfect organisation and the setting in which it was held, spectacular Évora University built many centuries ago.

Another hallmark of the conference were the ten plenary conferences that provided participants the opportunity to get to know a diverse array of speakers committed to social representations theory and research, among them some of the most honourable scholars in the field. The present special issue brings together, for the first time, the adapted texts of nine plenary conferences. In addition, the special issue features an original lexical analysis by Beatrice Madiot of (French-language) abstracts submitted to the international social representations conferences since 1996. And as a tribute to Serge Moscovici, the last contribution of the special issue is a personal interview Jorge Jesuino has recently carried out with the founder of social representations theory.

This collection of texts is remarkable for several reasons. First, the fact that virtually all keynote speakers agreed to write down and publish their talk in the *Papers of Social Representations* is an important recognition for the journal and its editorial team headed by Caroline Howarth. It suggests that the Papers are considered by many leading researchers in the field as the appropriate and legitimate outlet of work on social representations, thereby giving an important sign to the broader community of social representations researchers.

Second, the contributions of this special issue present rich and varied perspectives on social representations. They can be organised into four broad themes: Epistemology (Jodelet and Marková), Change (Arruda and Doise), History (Ben Alaya, László & Ehman, and Liu & Sibley) and Intergroup relations (Staerklé and Vala). These four themes speak to a large part of current work on social representations, both theoretical and empirical. The diversity of the contributions reflects to some extent the diversity of the field itself, in terms of epistemological positions and methodological approaches. In a way, then, the special issue “celebrates diversity” of social representations research, not as a goal in itself, but rather as a way to highlight the many different contributions the original theory has inspired. We hope that researchers in social representations and beyond will find ideas and inspiration in these texts for their own work. The texts should also be accessible enough in order to be interesting for a wide audience interested in social representations, including not only researchers, but also students and professionals.

Third, this collection is available for free for anyone interested. This open access policy of the Papers is crucial for the social representations community where many researchers have difficulties in accessing books or journals that require costly subscriptions. And as we know as social representation researchers, unrestricted and fair dissemination of information is the basis of scientific innovation and creativity!

But let us now move to the various papers of the special issue. In his contribution, *The true citizen: Social order and intergroup antagonisms in political lay thinking*, **Christian Staerklé** introduces the notion of intergroup antagonisms in social representations theory. He argues that such interdependent and dualist images of groups are a key category of social representations—widespread, organizing social behaviour and legitimizing political action. The principle of intergroup antagonisms is first illustrated with an experimental research programme on social representations of democratic and non-democratic populations. The findings suggest the

hegemony of colonial-style representations of free, rational and differentiated democratic populations, as opposed to submissive, irrational and homogeneous non-democratic populations. A second set of illustrations of intergroup antagonisms is organised around the *Social Order Representations Model* that formalises four types of intergroup antagonisms. The model is applied to examine popular support for government intervention, to organise differential meanings associated with the ambiguous concepts of equality and immigration, and to interpret the historical development of social order representations.

In *The Tunisian revolution: An object under construction*, **Dorra Ben Alaya** proposes an analysis of social representations associated with the Tunisian revolution of early 2011. Applying the concept of themata, Ben Alaya argues for the similarity between paradigmatic shifts in science and political revolutions. Using an original data collection strategy via Facebook, she analyses the radical rupture in representations occurring during and in the aftermath of the Tunisian revolution. At first, representations are highly ambiguous, due to the unthinkable and unimaginable nature of the events. At this point, representations simultaneously highlight euphoria about the overthrow of the regime and the chaos of post-revolutionary events. Five months after the revolution, representations are more polarized, split between the optimistic position of “We did it” and the pessimistic stance of rising anarchy and lack of democracy.

Content analysis of social representations of history is the focus of **János László**'s and **Bea Ehman**'s text on *Narrative social psychology and the narrative categorical content analysis (NarrCat) in the study of social representations of history*. The authors argue that social representations of history and collective memory are narratively constructed, and that these representations are tied to group identities, in particular national identities. They introduce an original method of narrative categorical content analysis (NarrCat) that allows “translating” historical narratives into theoretically defined psychological categories, for example attribution of emotions and cognitive states to ingroups and outgroups. As illustrations of this method, László and Ehman analyse the content of Hungarian national identity and the collective elaboration of the traumatic experience of Hungary's changing national borders following WW1.

Ivana Marková reflects upon *Ethics in the theory of social representations*. She argues that what differentiates humans from other species is their capacity of making ethical choices, that is, choices that are not based on neutral facts in social reality, but rather on practical common

sense knowledge. She sketches out the history of inferior and superior forms of knowing in the philosophy of mind, and puts the problem of the separation of values and facts into perspective. Based on writings by early 18th century scholar Giambattista Vico, Marková develops the intricate connection between ethics and common sense, and argues that because common sense gives rise to ethical decisions, social representations theory views humans necessarily as ethical beings.

James Liu and **Chris Sibley**, in *From ordinal representations to representational profiles: A primer for describing and modelling social representations of history*, describe the theoretical benefits of methodological diversity in the study of social representations of history. They argue that social representations theory has been more concerned with theoretical than with methodological advances. To remedy this lack of methodological reflexivity, Liu and Sibley outline four complementary analytic methods for the study of social representations of historical figures: (1) ordinal models that descriptively assess naming prevalence of historical figures across various national contexts; (2) dimensional models, based on multidimensional scaling techniques, that reveal the underlying structure of representations of historical figures and compare country-level configurations with one another; (3) factorial models, based on exploratory factor analyses, that identify coherent groupings of historical figures while presuming that a unitary concept underlies these evaluations; and (4) representational profile models, based on latent class analysis, that explore how subgroups of participants differ in their views of historical figures.

Based on a social representations reading of racism, **Jorge Vala** argues that racism and prejudice should be treated as distinct conceptual categories. In *Racisms: Social representations, racial prejudice and normative pressures*, he describes racism as a social representation about hierarchical differences between human groups. Thereby, racism is a social theory flexibly institutionalised depending on socio-historical and political circumstances. Racial prejudice, in turn, is an individualised concept that refers to negative attitudes and feelings towards groups defined on the basis of racial categories. These ideas are tested in an experimental research paradigm that shows that the anti-racist norm has an impact on the overt expression of racial prejudice, but not on its implicit expression. These findings demonstrate that racism has undergone adaptive transformations which make it possible to maintain the fundamental aspects

of traditional racial beliefs, without jeopardising the anti-racist norms of modern democratic institutions. Vala concludes by asking whether biological representations have again become the principal source of categorisation of social groups.

Willem Doise, in *Social psychology and social change*, reflects upon his own interest in the topic of societal change, an interest that is in stark contrast to much of contemporary research in social psychology that is hardly concerned with societal issues. Through a personal panorama of his own work since the mid 1960's, Doise shows how his motivation to study social change as a social psychologist was rooted in school experiences during his childhood, in the experience of intergroup conflict in Belgium, and in apparently fortuitous exchanges with colleagues. His analysis covers three major fields of his own research, (a) intergroup relations and crossed category memberships, (b) developmental psychology and the introduction of social inequality in Piagetian constructivism, and (c) societal psychology with a focus on representations of human rights and other formalised systems of rules and norms intervening in situations of conflict.

Angela Arruda places social representations theory within the broader context of paradigmatic changes in contemporary social theory. In *Modernity & Co: Repertoires of change*, Arruda questions the relationship between modernity and social representations and emphasizes the multiple and changing forms of modernity during the last 50 years. With respect to the recent changes in communication systems, Arruda suggests that social representations research seems to study a pre-digitalized world of printed media where television and films are the latest advances in mass communication. She then goes on to discuss the implications of post-structuralist and post-colonial theories on social representations theory, emphasizing their critique of the subject and the necessity for social representations theory to move beyond simple and unitary models of identity and group membership by embracing dynamic and fluid conceptions of the subject.

In her contribution *Encounters between forms of knowledge* ('La rencontre des savoirs'), **Denise Jodelet** examines the development of theoretical models concerned with the transmission and development of knowledge, arguing that there has been a recent shift towards the recognition of the contextualised nature of social understandings and the legitimacy of different types of knowledge. She analyses the theoretical implications of the confrontation between different systems of understanding in the fields of social intervention and action, for example between practical and theoretical knowledge in educational settings, or between lay and expert knowledge

in health contexts. As experiential forms of understanding with a practical aiming towards interpretation, behavioural orientation and communication, social representations, Jodelet claims, should be at the centre of contemporary theories on the diversity of knowledge.

The Évora conference also provided the opportunity for **Béatrice Madiot** to examine social representations as a scientific discipline on the basis of presentations at various international conferences of social representations. To analyse the field of social representations, Madiot presents a lexical content analysis of 611 abstracts of seven conferences, starting in 1996 in Aix-en-Provence until the 2012 Évora conference. For methodological reasons, her analysis includes only French-language abstracts. Although these abstracts cover only about a quarter of all presentations from the eleven conferences held so far, their analysis nevertheless provides interesting insights about the organisation of the field of social representations. Her rich analysis deals for example with the disciplinary background of the presentations, with the relative occurrence of the various social representation “schools”, with the use of mainstream social psychological concepts such as ‘social identity’ in social representations research, with methodological and analytical choices, and with the prevalence of objects of representation such as work, health and education.

The final word of this special issue is fittingly given to **Serge Moscovici**. As a tribute to Serge, **Jorge Jesuino** transcribed a recent interview in which they discuss current crises and societal changes, racism and persecution, aging and death. It is an honour for the *Papers of Social Representations* to publish this personal dialogue in which readers will discover yet new insights and reflections from the very person who initiated, over 50 years ago, the theory to which this journal is dedicated.

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