Editorial: Cultural Encounters and Social Solidarity

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The problem of social solidarity, of how to achieve goodwill and harmonious social relations within society, is, as noted by O'Sullivan-Lago (this issue), as old as society itself. Unsurprisingly, the problem has been thematised by religious leaders, rulers, philosophers and story tellers as far back as written records go. Religions have sought to create unity among people by propagating a common code and worship of a common god. Confucius argued that harmonious societies were not forged from punishment but led by virtue and the Emperor's search for the perfection of society. Plato argued that the perfect society is internally differentiated, with workers, warriors, and philosopher-kings each carrying out a different role, and each depending upon the other much in the same way that the organs of the human body are interdependent. The problem of solidarity arises out of the heterogeneity of society, whether amongst the common people or in the social positions created by society. Invariably the guiding motivation is to ensure that the heterogeneous groups comprising society interact in mutually beneficial ways. The challenges associated with this achievement remain today central concerns for many societies. If anything, these have been compounded by conditions that have arisen in late modernity, such as ICT and international trade (Giddens, 1991). The dual and contemporary salience of the global and the local in everyday life precipitates identity issues and brings about a fractured globalisation (Moghaddam, 2010), as individuals negotiate social reality amidst a plurality of points of view that draw on different worldviews than the ones

that structure local customs and practices. Cultural encounters have emerged as a conspicuous characteristic of contemporary social relations.

Durkheim (1893), in his theory of mechanical and organic solidarity, sought to describe solidarity in contemporary societies. He argued that in the past solidarity was 'mechanical' and had been based on similarity; people were bound together by the similarity of the world views and occupations. Industrialization, he argued, rapidly expanded the division of labor, giving individuals differential sets of experience, and thus undermining similarity. Industrialization thus called for a new form of solidarity, a form of solidarity Durkheim called organic solidarity. Organic solidarity is produced out of interdependence. Although industrialization created heterogeneous societies with many disparate groups, it also made those groups ever more interdependent – each group carrying out an ever more specific function within the social whole. But interdependence itself does not guarantee solidarity. According to Durkheim, social solidarity needs to be underpinned by shared collective representations.

As the authors in the present Special Issue note, Durkheim (1898) drew on his notion of collective representations to account for the collective consciousness that binds people together in a common mentality. Collective representations, which Durkheim distinguished from individual representations that are confined to the psychological domain and which constitute private beliefs and cognitions, are the knowledge frameworks that serve the basis for meaningful interaction. Durkehim (1898/1974) claimed that:

> Society has for its substratum the mass of associated individuals. The system which they form by uniting together, and which varies according to their geographical disposition and the nature and number of their channels of communication, is the base from which social life is raised. The representations which form the network of social life arise from the relations between the individuals thus combined or the secondary groups that are between the individuals and the total society (p. 24)

According to Durkheim, collective representations derive from the "association of minds" by virtue of which a "chemical synthesis results which concentrates and unifies the synthesised elements and by that transforms them" (p.

26). Following Durkheim, however, the social sciences' concern with social solidarity has ebbed and flowed. It stayed on the agenda, and remains today, through synonymous notions such as 'social cohesion' and 'social capital'. These keep drawing the attention of scholars to explanations of the factors that bond people together, in the hope of discovering some form of intervention that will dissipate intergroup conflict in contemporary societies, which are today, as the authors in this issue note, characteristically plural and diverse.

Today Durkheim's notion of collective representations has all but been forgotten, and, one may argue, for good reasons. Collective representations may provide a satisfactory explanation for the ties that bound members together in traditional societies, where presumably members faced little by way of cultural differences in the course of their existence. This conception of traditional society may be merely reified, in that no society can be reasonably presumed to be completely insular from intercultural encounters, even those of a traditional form. Human beings have after all, as O'Sullivan-Lago (this issue) argues, been on the move since the dawn of time. In any case, the notion of collective representations certainly does not correspond to the nature of contemporary societies, the boundaries of which are recurrently contested through the impact of globalisation. This fact has been noted by a number of authors in this special issue. Nevertheless, the recognition that cultural groups share some mental outlook or background of intelligibility is requisite for understanding social interaction, regardless of the fact whether this precedes or ensues such interaction. For this reason, the concern with knowledge remains prevalent in intercultural studies (see Bar-Tal & Kruglanski, 2010 ; Kruglanski, 1989; Jovchelovitch, 2007). And whilst Durkheim's notion of collective representations has been cast aside, it survives in Moscovici's (1961, 2000) notion of social representations.

This special issue coincides with the 50th anniversary of the publication of Moscovici's (1961) seminal work *'La Psychanalyse: son image et son public'*. It also coincides with the 20th anniversary of *'Papers on Social Representations'*. Moscovici's reformulation of the Durkheimian notion has spurred much research and stimulated scholarly imagination for half a century, resulting in contributions too numerous to mention. A forthcoming special issue in this journal aims to celebrate some of these achievements. Nevertheless, in spite of this fecundity, social representations theory has had little to say about Durkheim's concern with social

solidarity. Indeed, it was not until Duveen's (2008) posthumous paper marking the translation of Moscovici's original work in English, that the issue was put back on the agenda. In his concern with group relations, Duveen's opening questions posits the Durkheimian concern anew: "What is it that holds collectives together?" (p. 369). Duveen proceeds to take up the task himself, outlining the bonds that characterise different social groups marked by different communicative genres associated with different social representations. Duveen claims that "one can also identify different forms of affiliation corresponding to each communicative genre" (p. 372). He went on to argue that diffusion binds members of groups together in sympathy, propagation binds members together in communion, whilst propaganda binds members together in solidarity. In this way, sympathy, communion, and solidarity identify different types of group structure according to their social psychological organisation.

Whilst Duveen's paper is brief, we owe our inspiration to his foray. Our aim for this issue has been to exercise the imagination of scholars in the field of social representations and beyond, to address this imperative concern that remains central for policymakers today. We believed that if collective representations could serve towards an explanation of social solidarity at the time of Durkheim, then social representations theory, inasmuch as it has incorporated the character of changes that transpire between traditional and detraditional societies, ought to serve the same purpose at present. These aims are satisfied in the rich collection of papers that make up this special issue. These have extended the application of social representations theory beyond its prevailing concern with explanations of shared cultural meanings and practices, to accounts of social solidarity that are sensitive to the social psychological complexity of human nature on the one hand, whilst retaining an applied and pragmatic concern on the other. Each of the papers in this issue serves to extend this novel scholarly application of social representations theory beyond the community of scholars that have concerned themselves with the advancement of the theory over the years. In this way, each of the papers presented in this issue both appeals to some set audience as well as attracts a new one. We hope that this will serve to foster cross-disciplinary debate.

The first paper in this issue is Berry's paper on acculturation. Berry's extensive research is reviewed succinctly in this paper in light of major findings that have been made within the sub-discipline of cross-cultural psychology. Whilst some of these findings are relatively well-known, in this paper, Berry extends his concern to

an analysis of how policy frameworks could serve to foster integration, which is argued to best serve the establishment of social solidarity. O'Sullivan-Lago shares many of these same concerns. Her paper, however, presents a different approach to the problem of intercultural relations. Drawing on qualitative research with immigrants in Ireland, O'Sullivan-Lago demonstrates four representational strategies that foster perspective-taking with an unfamiliar other. According to O'Sullivan-Lago, these strategies serve to extend identities in ways that bridge the divide between self and other.

   The focus on identity negotiation is taken up further in Sammut's paper on civic solidarity. Sammut argues that contemporary forms of solidarity as well as processes of acculturation are best understood with recourse to processes of identity negotiation, that serve to provide individuals with social capital and a sense of being with others. Tsirogianni and Andreouli's paper extends the focus on dynamic intergroup relations, arguing that social solidarity is not a state to be achieved but a transient process of understanding. This puts the question of knowledge at the core of social solidarity. According to the authors, solidarity is a temporary bond that marks the fusion of horizons of different cultural groups or individuals. Tsirogianni and Andreouli further argue that this understanding has important policy ramifications for the promotion of intergroup solidarity. They propose that institutional structures need to provide an opportunity for learning about the other for individuals to become willing to confront the limits of their own understandings.

   The role of representing the other in collective imagination and relating to the other on the basis of the imagined realities ascribed to the other on the basis of social representation, is explored in further depth in Park's paper on ethical selves in light of poverty in Africa. Park investigates how Europeans construct themselves as ethical beings from a Cosmopolitan position in light of African poverty. Park argues that the Cosmopolitan position includes a notion of justice that provides an impulse to action. The social representation of African poverty is explored further from within, in Kessi's paper on social representations of development. In this paper, Kessi demonstrates that resisting stigmatizing representations of development serves as a basis for social change and the promotion of community cohesion. Employing Photovoice research methods, Kessi demonstrates that social identity determines social solidarity through challenging the assumptions of self-protection imbued in social representations. Finally, the link between social representations of an imagined

other and the fostering of transnational social solidarity is explored in an applied social representations study concerning the fairtrade farmer. Adams and Raisborough's investigate representations of the fairtrade farmer through the analysis of the self-control ethos. They extend this by incorporating aspects of ambivalence that have been documented in studies of prejudice and stereotypes. The authors conclude that relations of power characteristically typify cultural encounters even in instances of seemingly benevolent social representations.

This rich collection of papers provides an extensive diversity of both scholarly frameworks and empirical approaches, from cross-cultural studies to more localised research, from theoretical contributions to empirical investigations, and from quantitative methods to qualitative ones. We hope that this diversity serves to build bridges across these various disciplinary procedures. In spite of their diversity, these papers present a common thread in their suggestions for policy. These point towards the active recognition and promotion of plurality in contemporary societies. What these authors suggest is that when we need to relate to a culturally different other, we also have an imperative to understand the other in terms of the other's own cultural worldview, and to recognize the other's practices as valid, if different, cultured ways of life. Moreover, this imperative is equally extended to the other. If this reciprocity is mutual, as Berry proposes, it can bring about what Tsirogianni and Andreouli identify as a fusion of horizons. This could establish cultural integration on the basis of inclusive yet different identities. It seems that in contemporary societies, the achievement of social solidarity is more a duty and an obligation than it is a natural civic right.

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