

Spreading the theory in the Lusophone world: contributions of Jorge Vala's Chapters to the development of Social Representations studies in Brazil

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The theory of social representations has seen a significant evolution and dissemination throughout Brazil. This development has not been without practical implications outside academia, and its particular effects can be observed in social and political spheres as well. It is within this context, one of introduction and expansion of the theory in Brazil, that we address the significance of Jorge Vala's chapters. Published in two different editions of the 'Manual de Psicologia Social' (Vala & Monteiro, 1993/2000), the Portuguese Social Psychology handbook, Vala's chapters present an account of social representations both rigorous and unifying, drawing parallels between the theory and other approaches. The particular chapters and their contribution to Portuguese-speaking social psychologists in Brazil will be discussed.

The motivation to write this co-authored paper stemmed from the fact that all the authors were together when they had their first contacts with research in social psychology and in social representations. At that time we were all part of LACCOS – the Laboratory of the Social Psychology of Communication and Social Cognition, of the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC). Initially, the call for this special issue generated some debate among us, as the texts that contributed to our respective trajectories in social representation studies varied widely. We found ourselves, however, in agreement when considering which texts most markedly contributed to our basic understanding of social representations. Aiding our laboratory work on nearly a daily basis, we could not help but think of Jorge Vala’s 1993 chapter “Social representations: for a social psychology of the social thought” (*Representações sociais: Para uma psicologia social do pensamento social*), which was later reviewed and published in the 2000 edition as “Social representations and the social psychology of everyday knowledge” (*Representações sociais e psicologia social do conhecimento quotidiano*). Both articles are published in the Portuguese Social Psychology Handbook *Psicologia Social* (Vala & Monteiro, 1993/2000).

The theory of social representations initially spoke French and it took some time to gain a second language, English (Castro, 2002; Farr & Moscovici, 1984; Forgas, 1981). Presently, however, the literature in social representations contains a great deal of work in Portuguese and Spanish, one of the results of an extraordinary dissemination of the literature in Latin America (Balan, Ernst, Lo Monaco, Piermattéo, & Tavani, 2010). It is within this process of dissemination and adaptation to various contexts and different research goals that Vala’s work offers its greatest contribution. From our experience, Vala’s chapters have offered several generations of students in our laboratory both a starting point from which to understand social representations and a reference for later investigations. However, on account of a limited distribution of the handbook in Brazil, graduate students are more likely to be familiar with the chapters than undergraduates. When the handbook was first published in 1993, there were already two social psychology handbooks available in Portuguese in the Brazilian editorial market (Sá, 2007): Arthur Ramos’s handbook - dating back to 1936 - and Aroldo Rodrigues’s handbook. Neither of these, however, approached social representations. Besides these

works, the 1970s saw a marked proliferation of translations of American social psychological texts, such as Krech, Crutchfield and Ballachey (1969), Asch (1971) and Heider (1970) (cfr. Sá, 2007).

Vala's 1993 chapter is, to our knowledge, the first delineation of the social representations approach in a social psychology handbook written in Portuguese. This alone seems reason enough to address Vala's chapters in this special issue. However, their contribution to the Portuguese speaking community of social psychology extends beyond this, because Vala offers the social representations approach within the framework of social psychology.

In this context, we will discuss the importance of Vala's chapters for the Brazilian development of social psychology and, in particular, social representations, based on two reasons. The first is merely a matter of language, because the fact that the chapters are written in Portuguese, using Portuguese and Brazilian references, renders them more accessible to the Brazilian public – despite their low availability as part of an imported volume¹. The second is the effort Jorge Vala makes for offering a wide, extensive and unbiased literature review that integrates a reflexive view of various divides in social psychology, social cognition and social representations.

In the following sections, we will offer first a presentation and a synthesis of the chapters written by Jorge Vala for the two editions of the handbook. A brief historical context of the crisis in social psychology preceding the entrance of social representations theory in Brazil will follow, as well as the position taken by Vala in the chapters. To conclude, we outline a history of how the social representations approach was received in Brazil, placing this reception within the historical framework of the crisis in social psychology.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE CHAPTERS

As mentioned, Vala's first chapter can be found in a social psychology handbook published in Portugal by Jorge Vala and Maria Benedicta Monteiro in 1993. Today, this text remains one of the most complete social psychology works published in Portuguese.

¹ Still today the handbook is printed in Portugal by Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian and exported to Brazil.

The book offers a wide and systematic approach to social psychology, with 14 chapters covering varying levels of analysis (Doise, 1980) and approaches in social psychology (the 14 chapters are: 'The beginning of a discipline', 'The emergence of the American paradigm', 'The European social psychology', 'Methodological orientations in social psychology', 'Impression formation', 'Interpersonal attraction, sexuality and intimate relationships', 'Attribution: from inference to behavioural strategy', 'Attitudes', 'Social influence', 'Structure and group processes: interactions and efficacy factors', 'Social identity and intergroup relations', 'Conflict and cooperation in intergroup relations', and finally, 'Social representations: for a social psychology of the social thought'). Herein, social representations are presented as an approach among several other social psychological ones, demonstrating the chapter's unifying manner of relating the approach to other more conventional research perspectives in social psychology. Vala's second chapter was published in 2000, when the whole handbook suffered major revisions. The table of contents of the two editions of the chapter can be observed in Table 1.

Table 1: Contents and topic organization of the two chapters on social representations written by Jorge Vala in the handbooks edited by Vala and Monteiro (1993/2000)

Social representations – for a social psychology of social thought (1993)	Social representations and social psychology of everyday knowledge (2000)
<u>I The construction of a concept and phenomenon</u>	1 The field of the social representation concept
1 The field of the social representation concept	1.1 The representation as construction of an object and expression of a subject
a. The representation as construction of an object and expression of a subject	1.2 The representation as social representation
b. The representation as social representation	1.3 Social representations as social problem and investigation object
c. Social representations as social problem and investigation object	2 Socio-cognitive processes and social representations formation
2 Formation of social representations	2.1 Objectification
2.1 Socio-cognitive processes	a. Selective construction
a. Objectification	b. Systematisation
b. Anchoring	c. Naturalisation
2.2 Social factors and social representations construction	2.2 The study of the objectification process
	a. Personification
	b. Metaphorisation
	2.3 Anchoring
	2.4 The study of anchoring
3. The functions of social representations	3 The functions of social representations
a. Social representations and the significant organisation of reality	3.1 Social representations, explanation of behaviours and social relations
b. Social representations and communication	3.2 Social representations and behaviours
c. Social representations and behaviours	3.3 Social representations and social differentiation
d. Social representations and social differentiation	3.4. Social representations and communication
<u>II The onset of the social representations era</u>	
1 A new alchemy: the transformation of old in new	4 The theory of the central core of social representations
a. Durkheim and the collective representation concept	5 The ascendancy of social representations
b. Social representations, social construction of reality and sociology of everyday knowledge	5.1 Durkheim and the collective representation concept
c. From Wundt and McDougall to psychosocial articulation	5.2 Social representations, social construction of reality and sociology of everyday knowledge
d. The New Look and social perception	5.3. From Wundt and McDougall to psychosocial articulation
e. Heider and Ichheiser	

2 Social thought and social cognition	5.4 The New Look and social perception
a. Social representations and schemes	5.5 Heider and Ichheiser
b. Attribution processes and social representations	5.6 Vygotsky's contribution
3 The social construction of social representations	6 The social construction of social representations
3.1 The pressure to hegemony	6.1 The pressure to hegemony
3.2 Social differentiation and social representations differentiation	6.2 Social differentiation and social representations differentiation
a) Social categorisation, social identities and social representations	a. Setting of the problem
b) Structured groups, intergroup conflicts and social representations	b. Social categorisation and social identities
	c. Social identities, social comparison and construction of group norms and beliefs
	d. Social identities and polemic social representations

Vala begins his first chapter (1993 edition) by returning to Moscovici's (1981) proposition that individuals and groups think, transforming the information they receive through debate and interaction. Societies are thus understood as thinking environments as well as arguing contexts (Billig, 1988). This idea constitutes an alternative approach to social cognition. This presentation of social representations theory defines the concept of representation as constructing both the stimulus and the response, as opposed to the traditional understanding of representations as mere mediators between these terms. Also addressed are the key concepts of objectification and anchoring, the relationship between anchoring processes and communication systems, and related developments, such as "central core" theory. Vala (1993) discusses the variety of meanings assumed by the expression "social" in social representations theory, the historical origins and ancestor notions of the social representations concept, the relationship between social representations and behaviour, and the function and differentiations of representations. The chapter is illustrated by summaries of research conducted by authors affiliated with Portuguese and Brazilian institutions: Amâncio and Olivera's study examining the social representations of death, Ordaz's research on social representations related to suicide, and Sá's investigation concerning the links between social representation and the Brazilian economy.

In addition to a thorough review of social representations theory, both the 1993 and the 2000 chapters have several distinctive features that make them notable. The first

is Vala's effort to bridge issues of social representations theory with other, divergent traditions of research in social psychology. Examples include the discussion of how the personification process in objectification can be linked to the study of prototypes and categorization; the analysis of the intersection between social representations as resources explaining behaviour and causal attribution; and finally, the exploration of how the notions of social representations, social identity, social comparison and norms intermingle.

The 2000 edition of the chapter excluded subsections specifically devoted to the relations between social representations and the more social cognitive notions of schemata and attributions. On these sections of the 1993 chapter, the author creates a dialogue of ideas, putting social representation theory alongside other well-established traditions in social psychology. He suggests that these comparisons might contribute to the advance of the discipline of social psychology as a whole (Vala, 1993); that is, on the one hand, social representations theory might contribute to integrating some conflicting findings in social psychology. On the other, it might benefit from conclusions of other research perspectives in social psychology, thereby gradually refining itself. The 2000 chapter emphasizes, more than the previous one, processes that are specific to social representations theory. For example, the distinction between hegemonic, emancipated and polemic social representations was not made until the 2000 edition of the chapter, clearly showing an evolution between the two editions.

Recently, the whole handbook has been renewed and significantly changed. A new edition of the chapter is about to be published (Vala & Castro, in press). Compared to prior versions, this new chapter places less emphasis on the relation between social representations and social cognition. Written 50 years after the publication of its founding oeuvre, the latest edition of the chapter (now co-authored by Paula Castro) has assimilated the growing literature and the recent debates within the theory of social representations, addressing the various voices of the approach. It presents social representations as a stimulating field of study, with a significant body of research. Still, the new chapter continues to set the approach of social representations within the broad context of social psychology, linking it to both to traditional premises and new developments in the field.

We will now present the historical and epistemological context when social representations theory was introduced in Brazil.

THE CRISIS IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

At the time of the book's first edition (Vala & Monteiro, 1993), nearly twenty years had elapsed since the crisis in social psychology, and an extensive account of it and its effects had already been made (Rijsman & Stroebe, 1989). Let us first present some points about the debate behind this crisis.

If we consider that representing is an important part of human nature, then we can assume either that (1) we have non-mediated access to reality in order to represent it; or (2) a series of internal appraisals mediate our access to the world, interacting with it before a response is emitted. When taking the latter position, we are adopting an O-S-O-R model, a notion compatible with both social cognition and social representations. Vala (1993, p. 374) defends this notion, pointing to a philosophical debate between Locke and Leibnitz, mentioned by Moscovici (1984). Locke proposed that nothing could exist in the spirit that had not previously passed through the senses (defending an S-O-R model); Leibnitz, however, responded: "nothing, except the spirit itself" (defending an O-S-O-R, as the spirit could be the origin of stimuli). Since the cognitive revolution, this O-S-O-R model has become prevalent in social psychology. Some approaches, however, have taken the consequences of this O-S-O-R model further than others.

In their account of the consequences of the crisis in social psychology, Rijsman and Stroebe (1989) argue that it was to some extent resolved with the fragmentation of social psychology into two (or three, as we will show below) paradigms that at the time already existed "side by side with very little interaction" (pg. 341). If we see these in terms of a continuum, one extreme would be represented by the 'old paradigm', which tends to view social psychology as similar to the natural sciences, resorting to the hypothetico-deductive method to examine and understand social matters. This approach holds that internal mechanisms are the cause of external measurable events, which can be assessed through rigorous experimental research. This model would characterize the studies conducted in the realm of social cognition.

On the other extreme of this continuum, Rijsman and Stroebe (1989) plot the new social constructionist paradigms in social psychology (Harré 1972; Gergen, 1973). These approaches reject the fundamental beliefs of the old paradigm that, as they suggest, support the privatization of the social (Harré, 1993). Further, these new paradigms do not appraise theories based on their capacity to achieve truth, “but on their social intelligibility and power to invite forms of conduct which enact the truth that they project on the world” (p. 341).

Considering the two previous ‘extreme’ positions as existing on opposite sides of the spectrum, Rijsman and Stroebe (1989) locate the social representations approach at an intermediate position on the continuum. This would be a result of the fact that the theory operates, at the theoretical level, with constructionist elements, whereas at the methodological level, it presents individual and psychological characteristics. Social representations studies often utilize experimental methods, even if they sometimes are used for providing better descriptions (Moscovici, 1989). Social constructionist approaches would favour a re-conceptualization of social representations theory in non-cognitive terms, such as linguistic repertoires (Potter & Litton, 1985) or discursive practices (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). But this fails to consider the need for this concept to take several level of analysis into account, including also the individual one (Castro, 2003; Castro & Batel, 2008).

Given the polarized nature of this debate in the social psychological community when Vala first wrote the chapter in 1993, he greatly contributed to a better understanding of social representations and social cognition in Brazil, whilst leaving the discursive paradigms out of the debate. Similarities and differences between social representations and social cognition approaches are evident throughout the chapter, but most notably addressed in the section “Social thought and social cognition” (p. 373 of the 1993 edition²). Here, the relationship between the two approaches is initially established, setting the groundwork for two additional connections to be made: between social representations, the socio-cognitive notions of schemata (p. 374), and attributions (p. 374).

² This section was removed in the 2000 edition.

Table 1: Contents and topic organization of the two chapters on social representations written by Jorge Vala in the handbooks edited by Vala and Monteiro (1993/2000)

Social Cognition	Social Representations
Search for universal processes	Search for local and context-significant meaning
Process is more important than content	Content is more important than process
Internal processes through which knowledge is formed and transformed.	Interactive and external processes that guide the genesis, dynamics and plasticity of common sense
Effort to reduce as much as possible the influence of emotions	Cognitions articulated with evaluative and emotional spheres
Molecular	Molar

Schemata and social representations

Schemata and social representations are presented as comparable concepts, both of which would benefit from the studies made by one another. Vala (1993)³ starts by quoting Codol (1984) who defends a more cognitive analysis of social representations:

“As far as the mechanisms and the processes whereby representations are elaborated and communicated are concerned, they can only be understood in a dual and highly complex way which involves, on the one hand, both intergroup and interpersonal relationships and, on the other hand, the more specific cognitive mechanisms whereby individuals first perceive and reinspect reality” (Codol, 1984, p. 241 *cited by* Vala, 1993, p. 374, our translation)

Both approaches are presented as complementary, and addressing similar phenomena. Social representations and schemata are knowledge structures for the cognition of the social, having both been constructed as internalized social knowledge facilitating the treatment and retrieval of information (Augoustinos & Walker, 1995).

³ This section was removed in the 2000 edition.

Social representations and social cognition are yet presented as differing in two aspects: their level of analysis (Doise, 1980) and their conception of knowledge. With regard to level of analysis, social cognition considers data treatment to happen at the individual level, whereas social representations understand the individual's functioning from a societal and interactional perspective. As for their different views of knowledge, social representations theorists suggest that knowledge emerges from the point when social objects are constructed, through interaction and communication – not its processing, as the social cognitive approach holds.

Attribution theories and social representations

As models for understanding social life, both approaches have much in common. From an individual and socio-cognitive point of view, individuals can be regarded as information processors, selecting information from their environment before coming to a causal explanation or attribution of the behaviour or event in question. Conversely, from a societal view, social representations theory proposes that these insights, expectations and attributions do not arise autonomously from each individual, but are drawn from socio-cultural knowledge and socially shared beliefs (Augoustinos & Walker, 1995; Hewstone, 2001). The fundamental difference between the two approaches is once again the chosen level of analysis (Doise, 1980).

It is precisely these distinctions and comparisons that contribute to the refinement of the epistemological position taken by social representations theorists. These debates are, however, rarely addressed in our Brazilian universities. Following a trend first identified by Ozella (1996), between 1983 and 1993, Brazilian social psychology syllabi significantly increased their emphasis on a critical and Marxist psychology. According to the author, this shift in emphasis has occurred at the expense of teaching “mainstream” concepts and notions. In our view, ten years later, this tendency remains apparent in many of our universities, where a tacit consensus exists on the “critical” side of psychology, with little or no debate concerning the epistemological assumptions behind this model.

We will now describe how the social representations approach was successfully received by the Brazilian scientific community, and how Vala's chapters in particular came to be of such importance to us.

THE GOOD SEED IN FERTILE GROUND: SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS THEORY IN BRAZIL

As mentioned above, until the '70s Brazilian social psychology handbooks and universities were primarily influenced by North American intellectual traditions. However, this does not mean Brazilian social psychology indiscriminately reflected this influence. As a result of the crisis in social psychology, our scientific community lost some interest in the cognitive approaches (Sá, 2007). Subsequently, in the '70s and '80s, Latin American social psychologists became increasingly interested in the French school of social psychology (Flores Palacios, 2011). The seminars directed by Denise Jodelet and Serge Moscovici at the social psychology laboratory in the *École d'Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* (EHESS) therefore became a meeting place for Latin American researchers and students (Arruda, 2001).

Denise Jodelet was first invited for a stay in Brazil by Angela Arruda in 1982. From this first occasion in which the theory was presented to the Brazilian public, the visits of Denise Jodelet to the country became frequent, generating a diffusion of the theory throughout Brazil (Arruda, 2001; Jodelet, 2005). As in Europe, the social representations approach has seen some periods of latency in Brazil, most recognizably as a result of theoretical resistances that considered it to be far too "idealistic" or an "attitude theory with another name" (Arruda, 2001). However, an interest in phenomena of the symbolic order coupled with the political movement that marked the end of the military regime, allowed for a proper introduction of the new theory to the Brazilian scientific public (Arruda, 2001).

As soon as the theory began to spread amongst the scientific community, it generated a proliferation of scientific activity, and at this point the need to organize events in which to discuss the theory and disseminate relevant results started to grow. In 1994, the city of Rio de Janeiro held the II International Conference on Social

Representations (Jodelet, 2005), and soon afterwards, in 1998, the JIRS (*Jornadas Internacionais sobre Representações Sociais*) was created. Meetings have since been held in Natal, Florianópolis, João Pessoa, Brasília, Buenos Aires (Argentina) and Vitória. This is a scientific conference on social representations held in Brazil and strongly supported and attended by European social psychologists. It is considered to be a genuinely Brazilian project given its amplitude, diversity and openness to the several communities in the country.

Brazil has therefore become the primary promoter of events linked to the social representations approach in Latin America, and the amount of research conducted by Brazilian researchers on social representations places the country in a leading position among others on the continent (Flores Palacios, 2011). For instance, research networks and centres for research and education specifically devoted to the study of social representations have recently been established (e.g., the International Research Network on Health Representations, the International Research Centre in Social Psychology and Representations ‘Serge Moscovici’, and the International Centre of Studies on Social Representations and Subjectivity-Education - CIERS-ed) (Jodelet, 2011). On a broader international scale, Brazilian researchers are among the most productive and prolific in social representations work. Brazil ranks, for example, as the second country in number of communications presented at the 2010 International Conference of Social Representations in Tunis (Balan, et al., 2010).

However, despite the bulk of Brazilian production, we must stress that it holds some unique characteristics. For instance, studies held in Latin America, and specifically in Brazil, have focused primarily on the use of the social representations approach as a tool to better understand and intervene on social reality. This characteristic seems to be a typical feature of the manner in which Latin America has appropriated the theory (Jodelet, 2011). As a result of certain social conditions, the association between research and action (action-research) has been incorporated into Latin American social psychology, characterizing the scope of what is today better known as community psychology (Flores Palacios, 2011). The theory has therefore permitted, in this geographical space, offering voice to many communities with different visions of the world.

A second feature specific to Brazil is that the majority of research conducted on social representations has shifted toward the characterization of common sense contents and social knowledge in a descriptive fashion. The theory became, therefore, a framework with which to understand social knowledge, with a particular focus on pragmatic matters such as improvements in health and educational politics or the re-evaluation of health procedures and pedagogical protocols (Camargo, 2007).

These particular developments of social representations theory in Latin America and in Brazil reflect the tendency for social psychology to somehow lose intellectual identity when concentrating in applied areas (Jodelet, 2005). This tendency can represent a risk of theoretical weakness and declining sharpness. We believe that the chapter under discussion presents fine examples of how to both advance the theory and overcome this risk through theoretically grounded research.

Yet, in our view it should not be forgotten that all these debates and movements have only happened at those universities where research is practiced. Unfortunately, these institutions are a minority. Since the 90's in Brazil, the number of private psychology courses has largely outnumbered the public ones (Ozella, 1996). With regard to the former, research is rarely encouraged. Nearly all of the aforesaid movements in social psychology were therefore concentrated in the public institutions.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The pragmatic nature of social psychology in Latin America is indeed a response to practical needs. However, it is clearly reflective of certain consequences particular to the crisis in social psychology at the 70s as well. These effects are poignant in this part of the world, having stimulated the emergence of innovative, and politically engaged research emphasizing sustained social action (Flores Palacios, 2011). Still, the dangers of theoretical impoverishment linked to this type of research must be acknowledged. We can say without doubt that Vala's chapters have been for us an invaluable contribution for understanding the consequences of this crisis in contemporary Latin America, particularly in Brazil. At the time of its first edition, the handbook 'Psicologia Social' (Vala & Monteiro, 1993) was one of three handbooks written in Portuguese and the only

text granting social representations its proper place in social psychology. The 1993 chapter is also, to our knowledge, the first one proposing a more European framework for Social Psychology, committed to the view of social psychology not just as an experimental science, but also a social science (Farr, 1991).

The chapter is therefore in harmony with both the Brazilian historical and academic climate in general, a *zeitgeist* inclined toward a more societal view of social psychology. However, the cultural diversities and the continental size of Brazil restrict this analysis to a small number of universities.

Vala's chapters also present an elegant compromise between social cognitive approaches and the social representations approach, allowing room for debate between researchers from the two traditions. In this sense, Vala's chapters were also a stimulus for integrating paradigms that after the crisis had none or little interaction, and have significantly contributed to the understanding of social representations as a societal level phenomenon, which can and must be complemented by other research traditions, like those of the social cognition model, where analyses are calibrated on a more individual level.

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