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(Dis)Covering the Latin American "Other": Social (Meta)Representations of Latin Americans among Brazilians, Chileans and Mexicans

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The construction of Otherness plays a crucial role in societies. In Latin America, "the question of the Other" is a key element for understanding the region's history and the identity dynamics related to this social category. In this paper, we discuss a study that aimed to analyze social (meta)representations of Latin Americans among Brazilians, Chileans, and Mexicans, that is, we analyzed what participants think about Latin Americans and what they believe that those who are not from Latin America think about the region's inhabitants. We conducted a survey with 213 undergraduate and graduate students, from these three countries, through an online questionnaire. Following the theoretical-methodological orientation of the structural approach of Social Representations Theory, data were processed with EVOC software. The participants' representations regarding others' representations about Latin Americans were mainly shaped by negative stereotypes, and focused on poverty, violence, expressiveness, and the lack of instrumentality and responsibility of Latin Americans. Facing these hegemonic social representations, the students (re)elaborate representations that also comprise elements of polemic typology, therefore creating and/or focusing on different dimensions of comparison, as an attempt to enhance the ingroup's value. Moreover, the findings are discussed in terms of continuities and changes involved in

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the elaboration of social representations of Latin Americans, through elements that are (re)constructed based on the themata that sustain them (mainly derived from the relation between Self and Other). These representations contribute to the different possibilities of identification with Latin America, reaffirming the dynamic, ambiguous and polyphasic nature of social thought.

Keywords: Latin America, Otherness, Social identity, Social representations, Themata

The relations between Self[1] and Other have been a key element throughout human history, taking on different arrangements and involving conflicts, tensions and negotiations (Jahoda, 1999; Joffe, 2007; Jovchelovitch, 2002; Marková, 2015a; Philogène, 2007). Currently, the interactions with different Others become even more evident in the context of globalization, which leads to several economic, political and socio-cultural changes (Canclini, 1999). Such globalization processes – accompanied by other phenomena such as migratory movements – contribute to the redefinition of national borders (Beck, 2002). Therefore, they intensify the heterogeneity of identity processes (Hall, 2000) related to national and/or supranational groups.

The relation with the Other is part of the development of people's social identities and of social representations associated with different social objects (e.g., Jodelet, 1991; Moloney, Gamble, Hayman, & Smith, 2015; Moscovici, 1961/2004; Smith, O'Connor, & Joffe, 2015). Encounters with the Other presuppose contact with the unfamiliar (Moscovici, 2000), that is, with those who destabilize the desired order (Joffe, 2007). This is because they disturb and confuse our boundaries and identifications, and do not fit our world patterns (Bauman, 1997). Nevertheless, the difference of this Other "surprises more to the extent that, in fact, the Other is not so different, but a similar one that we cannot allocate" (Arruda, 2002, pp. 19-20).

The "question of the Other" (Todorov, 1983) plays a crucial role in the history of Latin America[2] and is based on ancient ways of relating to the Other. Jahoda (1999), in his work on

[1] As stated by Smith et al. (2015), we conceive of *Self* as the individual self as well as one's ingroup, and *Other* as not-self as well as those considered as outgroups.

[2] Latin America is a very heterogeneous region, which developed through several changes that happened in its countries over the centuries. This heterogeneity contributes to the controversy regarding the concept 'Latin America', as cultural, geopolitical and historical factors are all intertwined in the development of its definition (Brasil, 2017; Farret & Pinto, 2011). In this study, we follow the reference of the United Nations (UN, 2017), concerning the so-called "Latin America and the Caribbean" region which includes Mexico, the Caribbean and all areas and countries from the South and Central Americas. For further information on Latin America's history, see, for example: Bethell (1990); Burns & Charlip (2002); and Williamson (2009). In addition, for further discussions

the ancient roots of modern prejudice in Western culture, analyzes a set of images that have emerged since Antiquity, which initially contributed to the development of a Western identity, and were eventually used to justify the superiority of the West and its dominant status, while orientalising the Orient (Said, 1978/2007). These images were also used to justify colonization processes, such as those that took place in Latin American countries. Among such images are those related to animality, which have emerged since Antiquity. There are also images associated with childishness, which, although already existent during the "discoveries" of the "New World", became more widespread with the new colonial expansion from the late nineteenth century onwards. For example, the associated use of images of apes and children meant that native peoples were conceived of as being incapable, dependent, ignorant, and with a tendency toward imitation, as well as lacking morality, reason and impulse control. Such images are among the most relevant images underlying contemporary derogatory representations of different minority groups in Latin America and beyond. They serve to reinforce power asymmetries and boost discriminatory practices (Jahoda, 1999).

The categorization of the Other in terms of animality and nature implies the exclusion of certain groups from the realm of humanity (Marcu & Chryssochoou, 2005; Pérez, Moscovici, & Chulvi, 2002), mainly by means of a process of ontologization (Pérez et al., 2002). This exclusion takes place through the association of attributes related to culture (such as reason and autonomy) to the ingroup, usually a dominant group, and attributes associated with nature (such as docility and emotional dependence) to the outgroup, usually a minority group (Deschamps, Vala, Marinho, Lopes, & Cabecinhas, 2005). Such extreme differentiation between groups – although sometimes expressed in subtle ways and by means of "positive" stereotypes – stems from an essentialization of social categories (Wagner, Holtz, & Kashima, 2009), a process often involved in ingroup protection and intergroup differentiation (Smith et al., 2015; Tajfel, 1981). The Self-Other relation comprises these processes, which are also translated into a delineation of borders of belonging and exclusion between groups (Hall, 1996; Jodelet, 2002).

The construction of Otherness is permeated by the social representations that group members construct and share. Conversely, these representations are also expressions of the relations with Others and of one's belonging in diverse groups (Deschamps & Moliner, 2008; Howarth, 2002). Taking these considerations into account, this study is based on the theoretical resources offered by Social Representations Theory (SRT) (Moscovici, 1961/2004, 1988),

about the concept of Latin America and the countries that comprise it, see: Brasil (2017); Farret & Pinto (2011); and UN (2017).

complemented by Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The aim is to analyze the social representations that young adults from three Latin American countries share about Latin Americans.

According to SRT, social representations are theories of common sense, that is, a type of knowledge that allows individuals to comprehend, describe and signify reality, thus enabling social communication (Moscovici, 1961/2004). Among its different approaches, in this study we follow the theoretical-methodological orientation of the structural approach, or Central Core Theory (CCT) (Abric, 1993, 1998), according to which social representations are internally organized by a central core and a peripheral system which are interconnected and complementary. The central core is deeply influenced by social memory and by a group's normative system (Abric, 1993). It encompasses the most stable, coherent and consensual[3] elements of a social representation. It has a generative function, through which it provides meaning to shared elements of a social representation in a group, generating the signification of the representation; and an organizing function, which guarantees the organization of the representation by providing stability and unity to its elements (Abric, 1993; Sá, 1998).

On the other hand, the peripheral system bears the group's heterogeneity, by encompassing individual experiences and contradictions. It is therefore more sensitive to the immediate context and to changes, comprising more flexible elements (Abric, 1993). It has the following functions: (a) concreteness – it is situated at the interface between reality and the central system, allowing the central core to be concretized by means of a course of action; (b) regulation – it enables individual variations in the representations, allowing adaptation to reality and to the nearest context; (c) defence – the peripheral system's flexibility enhances its ability to adapt to new events and information by dealing with contradictions in order to protect the central core (Abric, 1993; Sá, 1998).

The structural approach also fosters reflections on the historicity of social representations, especially if associated with the concept of themata (Moscovici & Vignaux, 2000). Themata are antinomies that take part in the construction of social thought and that are deeply rooted in the culture of groups, being transmitted through generations, through language, in everyday interactions and by the media (Marková, 2003). The combination of these concepts provides a better understanding of the inter-relations between different temporal scales in social

[3] It is noteworthy that consensuality does not mean unanimity, which is a special case of consensuality. As Wolter (2018) argues: "In most cases, central elements are shared by a large part of the group in most situations, which is not equivalent to being activated every time by all members of the group in all situations" (p. 624).

representations, and of the malleability and fluidity involved in the re-construction of past knowledge and experiences based on present-day interactions (Villas Bôas, 2014).

Another aspect to be considered is that, as Cruz and Arruda (2008) argue, when the ingroup is the social object that requires signification, the identity function of social representations is even greater, intervening in ingroup protection and intergroup differentiation. Hence it is important to complement the analyses of social representations by also appealing to some of the discussions within SIT. According to SIT, social identity comprises emotional, cognitive and evaluative attributes concerning one's sense of belonging to diverse psychological groups. One of the crucial processes for the construction of social identity is social comparison, a mechanism through which individuals establish distinctions between "Us" and "Them", negotiating their different identifications (Tajfel, 1981). However, in the current context of globalization processes, the relations between "Us" and "Them" become even more complex (Chryssochoou, 2000), stressing the importance of analyzing the meanings that individuals attribute to their groups of belonging, especially in the case of supranational groups, such as Latin America.

Identities, therefore, develop not only from self-definitions and identifications, but also from comparisons with the way Others represent us, encompassing a "dialectic between how we see ourselves and how others see us" (Howarth, 2002, p. 159). Thus, understanding how Latin Americans construct their identity dynamics in relation to Latin America as a psychological group includes, among other factors, understanding how these individuals represent Latin Americans and how they think that others (who are not from Latin America) represent the people who were born in the region. In other words, it is also important to analyze the metarepresentations, i.e., those "representations of second order", which "are related to personal beliefs about the beliefs of another person" (Teixeira, 2006, p. 8). Consequently, when referring to the way in which individuals imagine the social representations that other groups have regarding their ingroup, metarepresentations provide important contributions, not only for a better understanding of the role that these individuals think they play in the social imaginary of other groups, but also for a better understanding of the behaviors of members of these groups in intergroup relations (e.g., Bonomo & Souza, 2013).

In this sense, we conducted a broader investigation aimed at analyzing how the identity processes of Latin Americans (from Brazil, Chile and Mexico) are constructed based on the dynamics of social belonging and on the social representations regarding Latin America, Latin

Americans and Latin American history (Brasil, 2017). In this paper we focus on the social representations associated with the object *Latin Americans*.

METHOD

The choice of the aforementioned Latin American countries (Brazil, Chile and Mexico) was made considering the following factors: (a) countries that had Portugal and Spain as their main colonizers, with Portuguese and Spanish as their official languages; (b) feasibility, i.e., we had contacts in these countries (mainly in Brazil) that could assist us with the dissemination of the questionnaire; (c) notwithstanding the crises that Brazil and Mexico, for instance, were facing during the time of data collection, these three countries are of great relevance in the region's economic, political, and social arena, being some of the largest economies in Latin America (Brazil and Mexico are the two largest) (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean [ECLAC], 2019).

Participants

In this study, took part 213 undergraduate and graduate students from Brazil (N = 112; 69.6% women; age M = 25.40, SD = 3.78), Chile (N = 47; 53.2% men, age M = 25.15, SD = 4.03), and Mexico (N = 54; 68.5% women, age M = 25.74, SD = 3.81). With regard to their political preference/orientation, 42.6% of Mexicans, 36.6% of Brazilians, and 31.9% of Chileans (37.1% of all participants) stated not having one or chose not to reveal it. Concerning the respondents who reported some political preference, 78.1% of Chileans, 64.5% of Mexicans, and 59.2% of Brazilians (64.9% of all participants) recognised themselves as left-wing oriented. It is noteworthy that the samples are neither representative of the entire population of these countries, nor of Latin America in general.

Procedures

Data were collected from the second half of 2015 until the beginning of 2016, via an online questionnaire, comprised of sociodemographic data and open-ended questions about the participants' social representations regarding *Latin Americans*, as well as their representations regarding others' representations about this social category. The word association tasks were as follows: "What do you think, feel, imagine when one talks about '*Latin Americans*'? (Write down 5 words or phrases that spring to mind)"; "What do you think that people who are not from Latin America think about *'Latin Americans*'? (Write down 5 words or phrases that spring

to mind)". After each of these questions, respondents were asked to indicate, for every expression they had mentioned in the previous question, the extent to which they considered it as positive or negative, on a scale ranging from 1 (very negative) to 7 (very positive). Participants were also asked if they considered themselves as having any of the characteristics they had mentioned regarding Latin Americans, and in case of an affirmative answer, which one(s). Besides these, the questionnaire contained questions regarding their level of identification (on a scale ranging from 1 = "not at all identified", to 7 = "highly identified") with different social groups (their own national groups, i.e., Brazilians, Chileans or Mexicans; Latin Americans; any ethnic/cultural group[4]; and other national groups).

We adapted the instrument according to language (Portuguese or Spanish), and also adapted the questions mentioning the countries' names accordingly. The instrument also included other open-ended questions about participants' social representations concerning Latin America and its history, and questions regarding the motives for their answers. Although not analyzed in this paper, these answers provided further contextualization for our analyses.

Analytic Strategies

Data processing of the word association tasks was performed using EVOC 2003 software (*Ensemble de Programmes Permettant l'Analyse des Evocations*) (Vergès, 2000). This software processes the evoked terms by the frequency of their evocations and their order of appearance, organizing them into four zones or quadrants, according to their importance for the internal organization (the structure) of the social representation, following CCT's premises (Abric, 1993, 1998).

The quadrants generated by this prototypical analysis (e.g., Wolter, 2018) are arranged along a horizontal axis, which refers to the average order of recall, and a vertical axis, referring to the average of the frequencies of evocation. The first quadrant is on the upper left side and includes elements that were very often and readily evoked, possibly corresponding to the central core; the second quadrant is situated on the upper right side and contains elements that were evoked very often and at a later stage, constituting the first periphery or proximal periphery; the third quadrant, also known as the contrast zone, is on the lower left side and includes elements rarely and readily evoked, which may indicate that these elements function as a

[4] We used the expression "ethnic/cultural group" in the questionnaire in order to enhance participants' comprehension of the question and allow them to further elaborate on different possibilities of belonging, be it related to "race", to different regions in their countries and/or to different native/indigenous groups.

supplement to the proximal periphery, or else may point towards the existence of subgroups that stress different elements from the majority. Lastly, the fourth quadrant is on the lower right part and includes those elements that were evoked rarely and at a later stage, indicating particularities within groups, and forming the second periphery or distant periphery.

Data regarding the levels of identification with different social groups and the evaluations of the evoked terms were processed with IBM SPSS Statistics 20 software, in order to perform calculations of descriptive statistics.

Throughout the investigation, ethical requirements regarding research with humans were followed, therefore participants were informed about the study's goals and procedures, had their anonymity safeguarded and participated on a voluntary basis. All such information was made available on the first page of the questionnaire, and only after agreeing with the terms did participants begin their participation in the study.

RESULTS

This section is organized as follows: initially we present the results regarding the students' identifications with different social groups. Then, we approach the results on the social representations associated with *Latin Americans*, followed by the metarepresentations of this social object. The presentation of results is conducted in a comparative, dialogical and fluid way between the three samples and between the different quadrants that make up the structure of the representations, by highlighting elements that helped us understand the phenomena under investigation. With regard to the participants' identity dynamics, their levels of identification with different groups are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1 – Levels of identification among Brazilians, Chileans and Mexicans in relation to different social groups

	Identification with own national group	Identification with Latin Americans	Identification with ethnic/cultural groups	Identification with other national groups
BRAZIL	6.08 (1.63)	4.90 (2.11)	3.25 (2.30)	3.09 (2.23)
CHILE	5.19 (2.03)	5.34 (1.74)	2.98 (2.09)	2.74 (1.98)
MEXICO	6.50 (1.13)	5.52 (2.00)	3.24 (2.34)	2.87 (2.03)

Note: This table shows average levels of identification (and standard deviation in parentheses). The Identification Scale used ranged from 1 = "not at all identified" to 7 = "highly identified".

The table shows that Mexican participants were the ones who seemed to identify themselves the most with the social group *Latin Americans* (*M* = 5.52, *SD* = 2.00) and with their national group (*M* = 6.50, *SD* = 1.13). Chilean respondents, in general, identified themselves more with the group *Latin Americans* (*M* = 5.34, *SD* = 1.74) than with their own national group (*M* = 5.19, *SD* = 2.03), while among Brazilian participants an opposite pattern was shown: they had higher level of identification with their own national group (*M* = 6.08, *SD* = 1.63) than with *Latin Americans* (*M* = 4.90, *SD* = 2.11).

Interestingly, when referring to different nationalities, Brazilian and Chilean respondents generally said they felt identified with different countries in South America, mainly Argentina, or with European countries, especially Italy and Germany, which had an important role in the demographic profile of both countries, through migratory processes mainly from the mid-nineteenth century onwards (e.g., Beneduzi, 2011). Also relevant were Portugal, for Brazilian participants, and Spain, for Chileans. On the other hand, Mexican students, when identifying themselves with South American countries, mentioned Colombia in particular, and also mentioned Central American countries in general, and made references to Spain and Japan. Regarding identification with ethnic groups, Brazilian participants generally referred to different states or regions of the country, naming terms such as *Gaúcho* (referring to the people who were born in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, in the South of the country) or *Nordestino* (which refers to the people who were born in the Northeast region of Brazil), while Mexicans and Chileans declared their identification with different indigenous groups/"*pueblos originarios*". Examples include the Aimaras, Quechuas and, especially, the Mapuche, in the case of Chile, and the Aztecs, Mayas, Otomis and Nahuas, in Mexico.

What "We" Think about Latin Americans

With respect to the social representations shared by the participants of the three countries regarding the social object *Latin Americans*, the following figure (Figure 1) shows the most relevant elements of the representational field for Brazilians, Chileans and Mexicans. The structures of these social representations were organized as follows: *Brazil* – intermediate frequency (IF) = 10, average order of evocations (OE) = 3, minimum frequency (MF) = 4; *Chile* – IF = 9, OE = 3.1, MF = 4; *Mexico* – IF = 9, OE = 3, MF = 4. The representational field of the Brazilian sample consisted of 155 different terms, while the Chilean and Mexican ones were composed of 97 and 95 terms, respectively.

Figure 1 – Quadrants of the social representations associated with the inductive term *Latin Americans* for Brazilians, Chileans and Mexicans

Average Frequencies	Average Order of Recall							
BRAZIL								
	< 3				**≥ 3**			
	Evoked Term	*F*	*OE*	*E*	*Evoked Term*	*F*	*OE*	*E*
≥ 10	Friendly	57	2.79	6.28	Attractive/sensual	10	3.60	5.40
	Hard-working	18	2.34	6.39	Cultural diversity	20	3.60	6.00
	Joyful	45	2.55	6.53	Dance/music	11	3.54	5.55
	Mestizos	13	2.46	6.00	Fighters	30	3.33	5.77
	Poor	24	2.87	1.21				
	Spanish speakers	14	2.14	4.57				
< 10	Belchior	4	2.75	3.25	Colonization	5	3.40	4.00
	Brown skinned	6	1.67	4.33	Corrupt	4	3.75	1.00
	Creative	5	2.80	5.20	Cunning	4	3.25	3.50
	Diversity	8	2.75	6.13	Discriminated	6	3.33	1.17
	Identity	4	2.25	6.25	Emotional/sensitive	6	3.83	5.33
	Indigenous people	9	2.11	4.33	Exploited	9	3.00	1.11
	Intellectuals	5	2.00	7.00	Ignorant	8	3.12	1.50
	Mexico	4	1.25	3.75	Irresponsible/untrustworthy	6	3.33	2.00
	Underdeveloped	4	2.50	2.00	Migrants	4	3.00	3.25
	Underemployed	4	2.50	1.00	Partygoers	6	3.00	5.33
					Religious	6	3.83	4.83
					Suffered	6	3.00	1.17
CHILE								
	< 3,1				**≥ 3,1**			
≥ 9	Friendly	25	2.96	6.28	Fighters	9	3.22	6.44
	Joyful	19	2.53	6.21				
< 9	Brown skinned	5	1.60	4.20	Cultural diversity	6	3.17	6.20
	Diversity	7	2.29	5.86	Dance/music	4	3.75	6.00
	Hard-working	5	2.40	5.60	Family	6	3.50	6.17
	Identity	5	2.80	6.20	Fun	4	3.25	5.25
	Indigenous people	6	2.17	5.67	Inequality	4	4.25	3.00
	Mestizos	7	2.00	6.14	Irresponsible/untrustworthy	4	4.00	1.50
	Poor	4	2.50	2.00				
	Violent/delinquent	4	2.75	2.75				
MEXICO								
	< 3				**≥ 3**			
≥ 9	Family	9	2.67	6.44	Cultural diversity	9	3.11	6.67
	Friendly	36	2.72	6.28	Fighters	9	3.67	6.67
	Hard-working	14	2.50	5.79				
	Joyful	18	2.94	6.17				
	Partygoers	9	2.78	5.22				
< 9	Dance/music	7	2.57	5.43	Discriminated	5	3.00	1.20
	Diversity	4	2.50	7.00	Irresponsible/untrustworthy	4	3.75	1.75
	Identity	8	1.87	6.25	Poor	4	3.00	1.50
	Spanish speakers	8	2.00	4.75	Pride	6	3.33	6.33

Note: Sequence of presentation of the results: evoked term; absolute frequency (F); average order of evocation (OE); average evaluation (E) (the scale used ranged from 1 = "very negative" to 7 = "very positive").

The elements that most likely constitute the central core of the social representations of Latin Americans held by Brazilian, Chilean and Mexican participants are *joyful* and *friendly*, both with very positive evaluations. Besides those, the element *hard-working* (with a positive evaluation) is also in the central core of the representations of Brazilians and Mexicans, and in the contrast zone in the Chilean sample. Other elements with a positive evaluation that were in common in the three samples were: *diversity* (contrast zone in the three countries); *cultural diversity*[5] (first periphery in Brazilian and Mexican samples, and second periphery in the Chilean sample); *fighters* (proximal periphery in the three samples), referring to Latin Americans' ability for struggle and resistance in the face of difficulties; *dance/music* (first periphery in Brazil, contrast zone in Mexico and second periphery in Chile); and *identity* (contrast zone in the three samples), which might evidence an identification with this social category. Other elements that indicate a recognition of this form of belonging (although not present in the three samples) were *family* (central core in Mexico and distant periphery in Chile) and *pride* (second periphery in Mexico).

Elements with positive evaluations in one or two samples were: *party-goers* (central core in Mexico and distant periphery in Brazil); *Spanish speakers* (central core in Brazil and contrast zone in Mexico); *mestizos* (central core in Brazil and contrast zone in Chile); *brown skinned* (contrast zone in Brazil and Chile), with almost "neutral" evaluations toward the mid-point of the seven-point scale, which might function as a descriptive element of people's appearance and/or be related to mixture, also present in the term *mestizos*; *indigenous people* (contrast zone in Brazil and Chile), but with an almost "neutral" evaluation in the Brazilian sample; *fun* (second periphery in Chile); *attractive/sensual* (first periphery in Brazil); *creative* (contrast zone in Brazil); *intellectuals* (contrast zone in Brazil); *emotional/sensitive* (second periphery in Brazil). Interestingly, when this last element was mentioned among the metarepresentations (although absent in the quadrants), it received a negative evaluation, meaning that those who mentioned this term think that others believe Latin Americans lack reason and share excessive attachment to emotions, according to some participants' explanations.

[5] We kept the terms *diversity* and *cultural diversity* separate, because when participants referred to *diversity*, it was a general form that could encompass both cultural and natural diversity, whereas when individuals used expressions specifically related to cultural wealth, cultural diversity or multiplicity, we encoded them as *cultural diversity*. When the answers referred to natural wealth or to the diversity of natural landscapes, they were grouped under the category *nature*. When participants referred to racial mixture, miscegenation (term most commonly used by Brazilian participants) or *mestizaje* (most commonly used by Chilean and Mexican participants), we grouped them under the category *mestizaje/mestizos*. However, what all these categories have in common is the reference to different forms of diversity that are subdivided into different elements in the representational field.

Despite the predominance of positive elements, several negatively evaluated terms were evoked by participants, especially among Brazilians. There were elements referring to conditions of *inequality* (distant periphery in Chile) and poverty in the region, which are also related to the process of *colonization* (distant periphery in Brazil) once faced by these countries: *poor* (central core in Brazil, contrast zone in Chile, and second periphery in Mexico); *discriminated* (second periphery in Brazil and Mexico); *underdeveloped* and *underemployed* (both in the contrast zone in Brazil); and *suffered* and *exploited* (both in the distant periphery in Brazil). Latin Americans were also represented, albeit peripherally, as: *irresponsible/untrustworthy* (second periphery in the three samples); and in some cases, as *violent/delinquent* (contrast zone in Chile); and *corrupt*, *ignorant* and *cunning* (distant periphery in Brazil). Among Brazilian participants there were also mentions of more descriptive and stereotyped terms, such as *Belchior* and *Mexico* (both in the contrast zone), and *migrants* (in the distant periphery).

When asked if they had some of the characteristics they had mentioned about Latin Americans, 89.3% of Brazilian participants, 87.2% of Chilean participants and 92.6% of Mexican participants gave an affirmative answer. Most of the participants in the three samples highlighted elements that they evaluated as positive among those they considered to have in common with the group *Latin Americans*. Examples include 'joy,' 'friendliness,' 'dance,' and 'resistance,' among others. As a Brazilian participant summarizes, he has "all that is good". In general, the negative characteristics they considered they also had were related to socio-historical and structural aspects of the regions' contexts, such as poverty, inequality, exploitation of labor, and discrimination suffered by some of them. Some participants from the three countries emphasised how this history of exploitation and difficulties unites them as Latin Americans, as these respondents stated: "we have a history of common exploitation" (Brazilian); "Resistance to social problems unites us" (Mexican); "We were historically mistreated, and we stood up" (Chilean).

What "Others" Think about Latin Americans

Figure 2 shows the most salient elements in the representational fields of Mexican, Chilean and Brazilian participants regarding what they believe that non-Latin Americans think about the region's inhabitants. The structures of these social metarepresentations were organized as follows: *Brazil* – IF = 8, OE = 2.9, MF = 4; *Chile* – IF = 9, OE = 3, MF = 3; *Mexico* – IF = 7, OE = 3, MF = 4. The representational field of the Brazilian sample consisted of 122 different

terms, while the Chilean and Mexican ones were composed of 73 and 76 terms, respectively. There was less variety of terms evoked by participants in the metarepresentations than in the representations of Latin Americans, which may be related to the hegemonic feature of these metarepresentations, which were composed of more consensual elements (Moscovici, 1988).

Figure 2 – Quadrants of the social metarepresentations associated with the inductive term *Latin Americans* for Brazilians, Chileans and Mexicans

Average Frequencies									
BRAZIL									
Average Order of Recall									
	< 2,9				**≥ 2,9**				
	Evoked Term	*F*	*OE*	*E*	*Evoked Term*	*F*	*OE*	*E*
≥ 8	Attractive/sensual	35	2.87	3.09	Dance/music	12	3.36	4.36
	Friendly	55	2.89	6.16	Despised/inferiorized	9	3.00	1.00
	Joyful	49	2.75	6.00	Football	8	3.62	2.25
	Lazy	13	1.77	1.69	Ignorant	27	2.96	1.37
	Party-goers	20	2.80	4.05	Savages/uncivilized	8	3.37	1.88
	Poor	49	2.37	1.35				
	Violent/delinquent	18	2.89	1.00				
< 8	Brown skinned	4	2.50	4.00	Backward	7	3.50	1.29
	Dirty	4	2.75	1.00	Black people	6	3.00	1.83
	Drugs	5	2.80	1.40	Creative	5	3.00	6.00
	Hard-working	6	2.67	5.83	Dishonest	5	3.20	1.80
	Irresponsible/untrustworthy	5	2.80	1.60	Disorderly	7	4.43	2.43
	Migrants	6	2.67	2.50	Exotic	6	3.60	2.83
	Nature	5	2.80	5.80	Fighters	6	3.83	5.00
					Fun	6	3.33	5.17
					Indigenous people	6	3.83	3.43
					Naïve	5	4.60	1.80
					Spanish speakers	6	3.33	3.83
					Suffered	4	3.50	1.00
					Tropical weather	4	3.00	5.50
CHILE									
	< 3				**≥ 3**			
≥ 9	Friendly	24	2.33	6.21	Ignorant	9	4.00	1.22
	Joyful	19	2.11	6.21				
	Poor	13	2.38	1.77				
	Violent/delinquent	23	2.96	1.61				
< 9	Alcoholic	3	2.00	2.67	Attractive/sensual	4	3.50	3.50
	Exotic	6	2.50	3.83	Dance/music	6	3.00	5.33
	Fighters	4	2.67	6.75	Despised/inferiorized	4	3.00	3.60
	Lazy	7	2.43	1.86	Disorderly	6	3.50	2.17
	Religious	4	2.75	1.75	Football	4	4.25	5.50
	Underdeveloped	7	2.86	2.14	Fun	3	3.00	5.75
					Indigenous people	4	3.25	3.50
					Irresponsible/untrustworthy	6	3.50	1.17
					Partygoers	6	3.17	4.83
MEXICO									
	< 3				**≥ 3**			
≥ 7	Friendly	33	2.94	5.88	Hard-working	7	3.14	5.71
	Ignorant	17	2.59	1.06	Violent/delinquent	16	3.56	1.00
	Joyful	24	2.42	5.71				
	Lazy	15	2.67	1.13				
	Partygoers	17	2.71	4.35				
	Poor	13	2.69	2.08				
< 7	Attractive/sensual	6	2.83	4.50	Corrupt	6	3.83	1.17
	Exotic	4	1.50	2.75	Dance/music	5	3.00	5.20
	Migrants	5	2.20	2.00	Despised/inferiorized	4	3.75	1.25
					Irresponsible/untrustworthy	4	3.75	1.75
					Religious	6	3.83	2.83

Note: Sequence of presentation of the results: evoked term; absolute frequency (F); average order of evocation (OE); average evaluation (E) (the scale used ranged from 1 = "very negative" to 7 = "very positive").

The Brazilians, Chileans and Mexicans who participated in the research think that those who are not from Latin America also consider Latin Americans as *joyful* and *friendly* (central core in the three samples). However, accompanying these positive elements at the core, there is also the element *poor* in the three samples. Participants also believe that Latin Americans are represented as *violent and delinquent* (central core in Brazil and Chile and first periphery in Mexico), *ignorant* (central core in Mexico and first periphery in Brazil and Chile) and *lazy* (central core in Brazil and Mexico and contrast zone in Chile), all negatively evaluated elements. In addition, they believe Latin Americans are represented as *party-goers* (central core in Brazil and in Mexico and second periphery in Chile), an element with positive evaluations, but near the mid-point of the scale; and *attractive/sensual* (central core in Brazil, contrast zone in Mexico and second periphery in Chile), an element with a negative average evaluation among Brazilians and Chileans, but slightly positive among the Mexican respondents.

Participants also think that others represent Latin Americans as *exotic* (contrast zone in Chile and Mexico, and second periphery in Brazil); *irresponsible/untrustworthy* (contrast zone in Brazil, and distant periphery in Chile and Mexico); *despised/inferiorized* (first periphery in Brazil, and second periphery in Chile and Mexico); *migrants* (contrast zone in Brazil and Mexico); *religious* (contrast zone in Chile and second periphery in Mexico); *disorderly* (second periphery in Brazil and Chile); *savages/uncivilized* (first periphery in Brazil); *corrupt* (second periphery in Mexico); *underdeveloped* (contrast zone in Chile); *alcoholics* (contrast zone in Chile); users and/or involved in trafficking *drugs* (contrast zone in Brazil); *dirty* (contrast zone in Brazil). There were also the elements *backward*, *dishonest*, *naïve*, *Spanish speakers* and *suffered*, in the distant periphery in the Brazilian sample, all with negative evaluations.

Besides these, there were elements related to color/race/ethnicity, such as *brown skinned* (contrast zone in Brazil), with a "neutral" average evaluation, *indigenous people* (second periphery in Brazil and Chile) and *black people* (distant periphery in Brazil), both with negative evaluations, especially the latter. Interestingly, there were no elements related to *mestizaje* or hybridization in the metarepresentations, that is, elements that indicated mixture and ethnic diversity in the region.

Among the elements with positive evaluations there were: *dance/music* (first periphery in Brazil, and distant periphery in Chile and Mexico), an element that received a positive evaluation in the Mexican and Chilean samples and an almost "neutral" one in the Brazilian sample; *hard-working* (first periphery in Mexico and contrast zone in Brazil); *fighters* (contrast zone in Chile and second periphery in Brazil); *fun* (second periphery in Chile and Brazil);

nature (contrast zone in Brazil); *tropical weather* and *creative* (both in the distant periphery in Brazil); and *football* (first periphery in Brazil and distant periphery in Chile), which obtained a positive average evaluation in the Chilean participants' metarepresentations, but a negative evaluation in the Brazilians' metarepresentations.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of the results regarding levels of identification together with the results concerning social (meta)representations of *Latin Americans* showed that despite evoking several elements in common with Chileans and Mexicans, Brazilian participants tended to mention terms that seemed to indicate both a positioning as part of the ingroup (Latin Americans), and a certain distance from the region. Such detachment might be linked to Brazil's historical distancing from Latin America (Cruz & Arruda, 2008; Onuki, Mouron, & Urdinez, 2016), which seemed to reflect on the participants' levels of identification with this supranational group. This relative distance is evident, for instance, in the evocation of more descriptive elements in the contrast zone and in the second periphery, as well as in the centrality of the element *Spanish speakers* for Brazilians' social representations of Latin Americans. Likewise, there also seemed to be a projection of characteristics of the subgroup (Brazil) in the supranational group (e.g., Wenzel, Mummendey, & Waldzus, 2007), as evidenced by elements such as *attractive/sensual* and *creative*. Although these elements were remembered in at least one of the other two samples, they were more central among Brazilian participants, and they are also elements that are usually linked to Brazilian people (e.g., DaMatta, 1979/1997).

In contrast, Chilean respondents seemed to have a more critical view of the region, sharing more polemic social representations. As for Mexican participants, although they evoked a number of stereotyped elements, similar to the Brazilians (such as *party-goers*, *dance/music*), they also emphasised their identification with the social category 'Latin Americans', by naming elements such as *family*, *identity* and *pride*, which corroborate their answers concerning their high level of identification with *Latin Americans*.

Interestingly, when asked about the characteristics they thought they had in common with Latin Americans, most participants in the three samples, including the Brazilian one, emphasised several positively evaluated features. This is consistent with an attempt to maintain positive distinctiveness, essential for the construction of social identity (Tajfel, 1974, 1981). In addition, throughout the study, participants shed light on the important role that resistance and struggle played in facing common difficulties and oppressors, thus enhancing social cohesion

and contributing to the construction of this supranational identity (Brasil & Cabecinhas, 2017). Overall, the results showed that, despite the differences in the levels of identification with different groups in the three samples, these identifications – regional, national and supranational – do not have to be mutually exclusive. They can coexist, and all of them can be recognized and stimulated (Hornsey & Hogg, 2000), despite the tensions and constant negotiations that might be needed and which are an intrinsic facet of identity dynamics (Howarth, 2011).

Despite national specificities, there were several common topics across the three samples. Regardless of the existence of more consensual elements in the central core of the social representations shared by participants, there were also representations of the polemic type (Moscovici, 1988), especially in the peripheral system. The polemic representations contested some of these hegemonic representations (Moscovici, 1988) and indicated an appreciation of the region and its inhabitants, hence intensifying the identity function of social representations (Breakwell, 1993; Howarth, 2002; Sá, 1998).

The variety of elements evoked in the peripheral system of the participants' representations and metarepresentations reflects the heterogeneity of this representational periphery, which includes more critical elements and more descriptive ones; together with more polemic, recent and minority elements and more consensual ones (Sá, Oliveira, & Prado, 2005). Such a peripheral system acts in the relation between the nearest context and the central core of these social representations (Abric, 1993; Sá, 1998), as well as reflects the contradictions, ambiguities and diversity existing between the members of these groups and their representations.

Elements related to hegemonic representations about Latin Americans – comprised of positive and negative stereotypes – were very frequent, particularly in the metarepresentations. However, in the metarepresentations, there were more negatively evaluated elements than within the participants' representations, even when referring to the same elements in both cases. The evaluation of these terms is different because the metarepresentations include more stereotypical elements, revealing the ontologization process, which links Latin Americans to nature (Deschamps et al., 2005; Marcu & Chryssochoou, 2005; Pérez et al., 2002), through an essentialization (Wagner et al., 2009) of the characteristics related to this group. This ontologization process was evidenced, for example, in elements such as *ignorant, savages/uncivilized* and *indigenous people*. In the context of the social representations the element 'indigenous people' was a matter of recognition of these native groups. Nevertheless, within the metarepresentations, it received a negative connotation, and was a means of

comparing Latin Americans to savages and primitives, according to the participants' explanations. Another element that shows this exclusion of certain groups from the realm of humanity is *attractive/sensual*. Within Brazilians' social representations, this was referring to an appreciation of the beauty and sensuality of Latin Americans. However, among the metarepresentations, it denoted a process of objectification (e.g., Loughnan et al., 2010), mainly referring to women's body and to their sexual availability, perceiving them as a hypersexualized and available "colonial body" (Gomes, 2013).

The participants from the three samples recognise their minority status in the world scenario and the existence of negative stereotypes that are usually linked to their ingroup. Their metarepresentations comprise elements referring to negative instrumentality, degeneration and vices (*ignorant*, *disorderly*, *irresponsible/untrustworthy*, *lazy*, *corrupt*, *alcoholics*, *drug users and/or dealers*, and *violent/delinquent*). Both in their representations and in their metarepresentations, there are terms related to the social and economic difficulties in the region, and that contribute to its unfavorable condition (*poor*, *suffered*, *underdeveloped*, *discriminated*, *exploited*, and *despised/inferiorized*). Besides, in both cases, there are elements that associate Latin Americans with expressiveness, with positive sociability (*joyful*, *fun*, *party-goers*, and *friendly*), with greater attachment to emotions than to reason (*emotional/sensitive*, and *religious*, in the metarepresentations), and with exoticism (*dance/music*, and *exotic*, in the metarepresentations). The results are similar to those found in studies involving different minority groups, in different contexts (e.g., Bonomo & Souza, 2013; Cabecinhas & Amâncio, 2004).

Despite recognizing their identification with a group to which negative stereotypes – such as those related to animality and childishness (Jahoda, 1999) – have historically been directed, individuals seek to guarantee the positive distinctiveness of their group, through the strategy of social creativity, by creating and/or focusing on different dimensions of comparison, as an attempt to enhance the value of the ingroup (Tajfel, 1974, 1981). Therefore, among the respondents' representations regarding Latin Americans, there are also elements that refer to strength, resistance and persistence in fighting against adversity (*fighters*, and *hard-working*), and elements related to group solidarity (*friendly*, and *family*) (cf. Cabecinhas & Amâncio, 2004).

Furthermore, *diversity* (in its different forms, as previously discussed), was a crucial element in the participants' social representations of Latin America in general (cf. Brasil, 2017) and of Latin Americans. As Jovchelovitch (2012) discusses, this diversity stems from the idea

of “mixture” (social, cultural, racial), which during the colonial period denoted impurity and degeneration. Such “mixture” was used to explain the shared representations regarding colonized peoples, who were conceived of as corrupt, lazy and lacking intellectual aptitude. However, new representations were articulated in order to emphasise the sociability and the creative potential that come from this mixture (Jovchelovitch, 2012). Thus, especially since the mid-nineteenth century, through the development of historical narratives on the construction of these new (in)dependent nations, *mestizaje* started to be used as an idea that could unify these nations (Amado, 2012), becoming the foundational myth of these “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983/2006).

Jovchelovitch (2012), in her analysis on social representations of the public sphere in Brazil, associates the Brazilian case with that of other Latin American countries, affirming that such narratives, which comprise stories told by colonizers and by colonized peoples,

> contributed to organise the central core of representations about the public sphere through a mythology of origins that recruits a foundational themata for Brazilians and indeed for Latin America as a whole: the clash between purity and impurity, the mixture of self and other, the desire for fusion and the fear of mixture that mark the development of identities and societies in the continent (p. 450).

Nonetheless, as has often occurred during the history of Latin American countries, the idea of a harmonious coexistence between different Others due to this “mixture” might also conceal a process of social exclusion of different groups and of disguised racism, under the excuse of *mestizaje* or hybridization (Barabas, 2000; Jovchelovitch, 2012).

In order to better understand the processes underlying the continuity of images and ideas that still play a relevant role in shaping the (meta)representations regarding different minority groups, such as Latin Americans, one should consider the importance of groups’ social memory (e.g., Halbwachs, 1950/1968), which is particularly associated with the processes of objectification and anchoring (Moscovici, 1961/2004), and makes possible for the past to become present (De Alba, 2011). Consequently, it allows a (re)construction of habits, values, traditions, history and culture of these groups, which are maintained and/or modified by interactions with the present (Villas Bôas, 2014). As Moscovici (2000) argues, “the more its origin [of a social representation] is forgotten, and its conventional nature ignored, the more *fossilized* it becomes”; it becomes something that “ceases to be ephemeral, changing and mortal and becomes instead lasting, permanent, almost immortal” (p. 27, emphasis in original).

For this reason, it is important to elucidate some of the themata (Moscovici & Vignaux, 2000) in which the respondents’ (meta)representations might be anchored. These themata are

discussed, for example, by Moscovici (2009) regarding the relations between dominant and minority groups, such as Gypsies. One of these antinomies is that of *pure/impure*, which in our study is objectified not only in the evocation of elements linked to lack of hygiene, such as *dirty*, but mainly in elements that refer to impurity and degeneration that arise from "mixture", such as those related to corruption and "sexual depravity", for instance. Another antinomy mentioned by Moscovici (2009) that also seems to underlie the participants' (meta)representations is *positive stigma/negative stigma*. On the one hand, the positive stigma is revealed in our results by the association of Latin Americans with dance, music, parties, joy, friendliness and fun. On the other hand, the negative stigma relates them to violence, danger, delinquency, which are also linked to the conditions of poverty and inequality associated with Latin America(ns). In addition to these, another antinomy that possibly underlies these representations is *savage/civilized*, which is generated by a more primary thema: *nature/culture*, which "can be used as a basis for a social classification within which certain minorities are represented outside the social map (ontologization)" (Pérez et al., 2002, p. 51).

Most of these antinomies in fact concern the relation between Self and Other. A relationship involving desire and repulsion, fear and fascination (Joffe, 2002, 2007), inasmuch as the differentiation between "Us" and "Them" is not only based on difference, but also on the possibility of identification. Consequently, in particular situations, individuals may distance themselves from those that threaten the positive distinctiveness of the ingroup (Tajfel, 1981). Therefore, these results underline the centrality of the *Self/Other* thema in the construction of common sense, by serving as a fundamental thema from which other antinomies are derived (Marková, 2015a, 2015b; Moloney et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2015). Consequently, according to Marková (2015b), "the Self/Other thema can be regarded as a vital epistemological thema from which numerous content themata (thematic concepts) can be derived" (p. 4.23).

Hence, derived from some of the same themata, hegemonic and polemic representations coexist and compete in the participants' representational fields associated with the social object *Latin Americans*. This is possible due to the process of cognitive polyphasia. This process contributes to plasticity in the way individuals represent the world, by negotiating ambiguities that coexist in the same representational field, thus, providing such representations with a communicative flexibility, which contributes to social cohesion and to identity protection of groups, as well as to intergroup solidarity (Jovchelovitch, 2012).

Moreover, this study evidences the importance of bringing phenomena to consciousness in order to promote social change, especially phenomena that involve these underlying, deep-

seated ideas that constitute themata. As Smith et al. (2015) argue, "[t]he implicit nature of themata contributes to their durability, and that of the behavioral patterns and social structures that they support. However, when themata are brought to conscious attention, change may become possible" (pp. 1.17-1.18).

Finally, given the relevance of historicity and context when analyzing social representations, it is important to highlight that the results found in our study reflect the political, economic and social tensions which Brazil, Chile and Mexico were going through during the period of data collection. In Brazil, the months between the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2016 were particularly rough due to the voting and implementation of the impeachment process of former President Dilma Rousseff. This socio-political context contributed, for instance, to divergencies regarding the impact (positive or negative) of democracies in the history of Latin America, as discussed in another study (Brasil & Cabecinhas, 2017).

Since then, Latin America faced several changes: in some countries there has been an expressive political turn to the right, such as in Brazil, with the election of President Jair Bolsonaro. Furthermore, the region is facing one of its largest "migratory crisis" because of the social and political upheaval in Venezuela, which also recaptures the debate on the role that the United States plays in Latin America, especially when considering the possibility of a military intervention in this South American country (or in any other Latin American country facing different kinds of socio-political disruptions). In this scenario, studying social representations of Latin America(ns) becomes even more relevant. Nevertheless, a few questions are worthy of further reflection: If this study were to be carried out after the election of the current presidents of Brazil, Chile and Mexico, and of Donald Trump in the United States, what would the results show? Would the respondents further emphasise elements that point out to polemic representations regarding Latin Americans? What would they highlight the most: their regional, national and/or supranational identification? These are some of the possible threads of discussion that are left for future studies on this subject.

Limitations

The main limitations of this study were the following. The sample sizes and the characteristics of the participants – for instance, young people, with high educational levels, mostly politically left-wing oriented (considering those who disclosed their preference), and who, in general, felt identified with the social group *Latin Americans* – might not represent the

reality of these countries. Consequently, we can neither generalize the results to the population of Brazil, Chile and Mexico, nor to Latin America. Additionally, in this exploratory study, we only used basic statistical analyses (average, frequencies and standard deviation) for processing data from the word association tasks and from the questions on levels of identification. Further studies could benefit from the use of more complex statistical procedures for analyzing this type of data, such as Multidimensional Scaling (Spini, 2002) or Correspondence Analysis (Doise, Clémence, & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1992).

Moreover, we emphasize that identity processes involve a complexity that we can hardly grasp with just a question on levels of identification. Although not discussed in this paper, it is also important to consider that a person's identification with a particular group does not always coincide with her/his sense of belonging to this group. There are many factors that can influence the sense of belonging and identification in relation to different groups, especially when considering the different meanings that individuals may attribute to these social categories and how they (re)negotiate these multiple possibilities of identification.

Future studies could be conducted by means of other procedures for collecting and analyzing data, as well as assembling larger samples from other Latin American countries. Besides, further research is needed on the silent zone (Abric, 2003) of these social representations regarding Latin America(ns), that is, on the unspoken, the absent, on what one chooses not to speak explicitly, as it may create a threat to the group or conflict with its social norms (Cruz & Arruda, 2008).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper we analyzed social representations that participants from three Latin American countries share about Latin Americans and the representations they think others share regarding this social category. The study encouraged discussions on the continuities and changes involved in the elaboration of social representations about Latin Americans, through elements that are (re)constructed based on themata that sustain them, which are mainly derived from the relation between Self and Other.

It is noteworthy that despite some changes throughout the years in the negative stereotypes attributed to different minority groups, and specifically to Latin Americans, due to the increase of antiracist norms, many of the meanings related to them still remain, albeit in more "subtle" ways, linking them to expressiveness and exoticism, for example. Regardless of the strategies used by individuals to deal with belonging to a minority group and with the

negative stereotypes directed at them, it is known that such stereotypes may have harmful effects on intergroup relations, contributing to the dissemination of stigmatizing representations and practices (Howarth, 2006). Additionally, there is also the danger of the internalization of inferiority by members of these minority groups, as a consequence of the constant diffusion of these negative stereotypes and of discriminatory practices directed at them (Joffe, 2002). This internalization could have, in the case of Latin Americans, several consequences, such as contributing to the maintenance of a coloniality of power (Quijano, 2005), of knowledge (Lander, 2000) and of being (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

Therefore, just as a social representation can serve as a means of maintaining power asymmetries, it can also enable resistance, critique and social change (Phoenix, Howarth, & Philogène, 2017). In order to make these changes possible, it is of crucial importance to listen to what these Others have to say about themselves, about their history, their beliefs and their affections. This could enable greater empathy and understanding of their perspective (Sammut, 2010), and, instead of covering these Others (Dussel, 1993), it might open up the possibility of rediscovering them (Jovchelovitch, 2002) through intercultural dialogue (Brasil & Cabecinhas, 2019) and respect.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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