

Book Review. Jodelet, D., Vala, J., & Drozda-Senkowska, E. (2020). *Societies Under Threat. A Pluri-disciplinary Approach*. Springer.

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Jodelet, Vala and Drozda-Senkowska report a collective work, as a scientific manifesto, on an emerging paradigm: threats. This book is made of three parts: the redefinition of the concept, its social construction and strategies to face threats. In the first chapter, the definition highlights differences between threat and risk. Thus, the threat would be inevitable, uncertain and unpredictable, with the capacity to transcend humanity. The recent multiplication of threats marks the relevance of the work carried out regarding to current societal issues. The second chapter deals with the construction of threats. This construction might be inherent in a scientific conceptualization of a particular threat, social perception of that threat, but also its embodiment in social groups. Finally, the third chapter focuses on social and political reception of the threat, and various strategies established to respond to these issues. In dealing with the concept of threat, this book proposes to lay the emphasis on the fertile place occupied by human and social sciences, in particular social psychology through the approach of social representations.

Keywords: threat, social psychology, risk, social representations

The book *Societies Under Threat*, is a collective work edited by Denise Jodelet (EHESS: EHESS: École des hautes études en sciences sociales), Jorge Vala (University of Lisbon) and Ewa Drozda-Senkowska (University of Paris). This set of texts is prefaced by M. Wieviorka (sociologist), and J.-P. Dozon (anthropologist), both at the EHESS.

The volume could be described as a scientific manifesto, as it proposes the basis for a new scientific paradigm: that of threat. The authors started from the observation that literature on risk, coming from multiple disciplinary fields, was insufficient to understand and analyse certain new threat phenomena. This book seeks to provide readers with a general and introductory perspective on issues related to threat phenomena, while drawing on concrete social and historical examples and various disciplinary fields. First, this book proposes to circumscribe the notion of threat. Then, it proposes to study the emergence and construction processes of threats. Finally, in the light of the current example, it proposes to analyse the various means of dealing with it.

WHAT IS THE THREAT?

Before tackling the processes of emergence, it is necessary to better define what is covered by the scientific concept of threat. How are they defined? What are their characteristics? How can they be identified? What is their place in the scientific literature? Jodelet decides to approach the notion of threat from a socio-psychological point of view, and to open avenues of analysis of this social object. The author first contributes by circumscribing the concept of threat. It appears to have “degree of inevitability in its occurrence, uncertainty in its actualization, and unpredictability in its effects” (p. 17). It thus differentiates the threat from similar notions (risk, danger, catastrophe). Secondly, the chapter looks at the targets and effects of the threat. Charles and Kalaora (chapter 3) return to the commonalities and differences between risk and threat. Risk can be quantified objectively and calls intrinsically to action. On the contrary, threat is linked to social sharing and will limit action. The authors then use environmental issues as an example. Finally, they show that the multiplication of risks, the processes of resistance to these same risks and their underestimation in a contemporary context, will lead to exacerbate the threat. Through a reminder of the environmental stakes, Bourg returns to the transcendental aspect of the threat. He reconstructs the historical anchoring of the notion of risk within society and he presents the consequences of threats. For the author, the outdated notion of risk conceals the nature and extent of the harm caused to the environment. Atlan is also interested in the links

between new forms of communication and threats in the post-truth age. He questions the existence of a threat via rumours and new ways of communication. The final chapter of this first part concludes the reflections on the concept of threat. Breakwell then discusses the “complex relationship between societal uncertainty, threat and the dynamics of identity processes” (p. 68). Thus, the modern era would be marked by a multitude of changes. These transformations bring a certain degree of uncertainty that will constitute a threat to identity processes. These social and identity uncertainties reduce the capacity to respond to threats.

CONSTRUCTION OF THREATS

This section focuses on the construction of threats and its links with culture, intergroup relations and identity. The first chapter aims to discuss the conceptualization of terrorism in the social sciences and its changes between ages with a sociological, psychological and historical approach. In recent years, two conceptions of terrorism can be distinguished: ‘classical terrorism’ (beginning in the 1960s) and ‘global terrorism’ (beginning in the 1980s). Jihadism is one of the main expressions of contemporary global and religious terrorism, and can be distinguished by four types, going from the global climax with the image of the 9-11 to the image of ‘lone wolves’. The second and third chapters aim to understand how threats are perceived and socially constructed in specific social contexts, through the social representations approach and the process of anchoring. Thus, the second chapter focuses on the threat of climate change through three studies carried out in France and Germany, with the aim of understanding how this threat is perceived in two distinct cultural contexts. The results highlighted that the threat of climate change is represented differently depending on the historical context and cultural beliefs. The link between national identity and a symbolic threat is also outlined in the third chapter through the naming dispute between Greece and the Republic of North Macedonia. Indeed, denominations can carry meanings and contents referring to social identity. Thus, the name of North Macedonia can be represented as a collective symbolic threat to the national identity of the Greeks. This chapter develops the hypothesis that “the familiarization traditionally attributed to anchoring can also work in the other direction, transmitting and guaranteeing the unfamiliar, ensuring that the unfamiliar remains so, thus establishing strangeness” (p. 109). Chapters four and five focus on social representations of social groups as a threat. In the first part of chapter four, the authors develop the metaphor of a relationship between majority and minority in terms of purity and threat. According to the authors, the

purpose of the majority is to remain 'pure'. Thus, the 'wild' minority will be represented as a threat to the majority, through stigmatizing thought, and a process of otherization. Finally, the fifth chapter emphasizes that social representations can contribute to reducing uncertainty in new critical social situations through the creation of shared common sense and through the process of familiarization. These representations can lead to behaviours of collective blame or involvement in social movements and therefore to the representation of the minority as a threat to the well-being of the in-group. Thus, the authors underline that negative attitudes toward refugees in European societies are especially related to social disaffection and mediated by cultural, economic and security threat perceptions.

FACE THREATS

How does one deal with threats in the social space, and how do the social, cultural and historical peculiarities of a threat involve different adaptations? Individuals and groups must develop specific, sometimes new, adaptations to deal with these multiple threats. The first and the second chapter deal with the risk of climate change, which is gradually turning into a threat. The first chapter, a portrait of past, present and future perceptions of anthropogenic climate change, reveals a historical tracing that forces a reflection on the future consequences of this threat, which will certainly become plural, and reflects on how to deal with it. In light of scientific advances and government strategies, in this book, Santos describes a situation where uncertainty is dominant, where individuals struggle to reduce it and develop strategies to control, what becomes, a threat. The second chapter focuses here on the reactions of the political and public spheres with regard to the knowledge produced by the scientific community. It is through the metaphor of 'financial black swans', improbable and inevitable at the same time, that Walter proposes to discuss the threat. The third chapter aims to discuss the threat of financial black swans from the perspective of mathematical risk modelling from an example of market crashes or financial meltdowns, like the financial crisis of 2008. The fourth chapter focuses on the collective oblivion of the Spanish flu at a national level (Portugal). While it is accepted that the competition with the Great War may have participated in this historical silence, Lima and Sobral demonstrate that other reasons might be implied. Considered as a collective failure, institutional and scientific, but also represented as a banal risk, this pandemic falls silent in the public space and is relegated to the private mnemonic community. Treated through collective trauma, Rimé proposes to connect the processes that allow us to face the

threat collectively, and to regain stability by reaffirming what the collective shares. Two major responses develop to counter the traumatic shock wave: crowd gatherings and the interpersonal process of the social sharing of emotions. The collective effervescence and the foundation of a societal fabric through emotional synchronization are presented here as tools of resilience.

Throughout this book, we are offered a reading of the threat that forces reflection about the current situation, threatening on the social, political, and health levels. Social psychology and in particular the approach of social representations allows us to consider the object ‘threat’ as something socially located. This theme is all the more interesting as our societies find themselves in the midst of inevitable and new phenomena, as evidenced by the current pandemic situation of Covid-19.

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