Chapter 4

Back to New Roots: Societal Psychology and Social Representations

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The present chapter describes theory and research in societal psychology from the perspective of social representations theory. In terms of research objects, societal psychology is concerned with the study of social psychological processes as they relate to major contemporary social issues such as inequality, diversity, rights and justice. In terms of social processes, societal psychology aims to account for the social and psychological factors which underlie political and ideological legitimacy (see Jost & Major, 2001) and which thereby contribute to the maintenance of the social status quo or on the contrary lead to attempts at social change. Societal psychology thereby necessarily articulates levels of analysis, in particular with respect to the complex relationships between shared ideological beliefs, group memberships, and individual thought and action (Doise & Staerklé, 2002).

During the last two decades, an increasing part of research in social psychology has been devoted to societal issues. Starting in the early nineties, a number of landmark papers (e.g., Doise, Spini & Clémence, 1999; Duckitt, 2001; Ellemers, 1993; Hoffmann & Hurst, 1990; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Major, 1994; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth & Malle, 1994; Reicher, 2004; Wright, Taylor & Moghaddam, 1990) and books (e.g., Deaux & Philogène, 2001; Doise, 2001; Jackman, 1994; Jost & Major, 2001; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) have been published which paved the way for a more *social* social psychology. These studies and theories were concerned in particular with analyses of the fundamental structuring principles of social inequality, namely gender, age, education, class, ethnicity and nationality. They stand for a movement towards a more societal view of social psychology which has exerted a strong influence

on a new generation of researchers who were eager to discover less individualistic perspectives on social psychology than the ones offered by the dominant individualist or cognitive paradigms of experimental social psychology. Who could have anticipated, in the heyday of cognitive approaches, that soon the pre-eminence of individualised and universalist models of human thought and behaviour would be challenged by models which focus their analysis on the social contexts and ideological functions of psychological processes? Yet, as we will see, the claim for a more *social* social psychology was far from new (see Cartwright, 1979; Israel & Tajfel, 1972). Only this time, it actually seemed to spark off a new movement.

In this chapter, we review some of this research concerned with social issues, and discuss two broad criteria derived from a social representations approach to social psychology which can be used to specify such research. We refer to this kind of research as "societal psychology" which is eclectic in its epistemological, theoretical and methodological orientations, but which may nevertheless be circumscribed with two general principles. The first principle is defined by a focus on *normative* determinants of human thought and behaviour. Normativity refers here to the idea that individuals necessarily call upon *collective meaning systems* in order to think and act meaningfully. In this view, psychological processes which have traditionally been explained in terms of individual needs and capacities (e.g., categorisation and stereotyping as a result of limited information processing capacities, prejudice to satisfy motivational needs, self-interest as a basis of human behaviour) are understood in the context of shared beliefs and cultural values which regulate social relations. Societal psychology therefore recasts psychological motives within a normative framework which provides social meaning to cognitive and motivational processes. For example, ideological dimensions such as authoritarianism, individualism, liberalism, or multiculturalism are understood and analysed as shared political belief systems which organise social relations rather than as individual difference or even stable personality variables (Staerklé, 2009). To the extent that this normative principle is concerned with the analysis of the formation, structure and function of collective meaning systems, we can relate it to the *objectification* process laid out in a social representational approach (Moscovici, 1961/2008; Moscovici & Hewstone, 1983).

A second general principle refers to social, institutional, and historical *contextualisation* of psychological processes. This principle is based upon the idea that many psychological processes (at least those which are of interest from a societal psychology view such as stereotyping of subordinate groups, racial categorisation or meritocratic justice judgements) are not universal. Such processes may indeed appear as "normal" or legitimate in some contexts, but as exceptional or undesirable in others. Shared norms and values of some social contexts may for example encourage and justify discriminatory treatment of subordinate groups, while in other contexts such behaviours are frowned upon or even legally sanctioned. The scope, frequency and meaning of psychological processes thus vary as a function of social contexts which provide specific meaning and normative support for these processes. Groups and social categories at every level of categorisation make up these normative contexts in which individuals are embedded. As much as a group of friends creates its own norms regulating the behaviour of its members, a social category (e. g., working class), a city or a national society develop sets of norms – Moscovici's "meta-system" – which regulate the psychological processes of its members. This second principle of societal psychology is therefore concerned with the analysis of individual- and group-level variation of collective meaning systems. It captures the *anchoring* of representations in social contexts in which group members form, express and justify their attitudes and actions with reference to salient or relevant group norms.

The chapter will illustrate these two criteria of societal psychology with examples of relevant research. The normativity of attitudes and behaviours will be exemplified with a social approach to authoritarianism and to self-interest as well as with studies on the relationship between ideological values and stereotypes. The model of lay conceptions of social order (Staerklé, 2009) aims to formalize the multiple norms which organise social relations and regulate psychological processes. The social anchoring of psychological processes, in turn, will be illustrated with examples of our own survey research on welfare attitudes and nationalism. But let us start with a few considerations which put the current situation of societal psychology into a historical perspective.

Normative foundations of human behaviour

In social psychological theorising, there is a large consensus today that shared values, norms and beliefs are central components of human behaviour (Augoustinos, Walker & Donaghue, 2006; Bar-Tal, 2000; Deaux & Philogène, 2001; Doise & Staerklé, 2002; Hardin & Higgins, 1996; Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Elcheroth, Doise & Reicher, 2011). This recognition of the central role of shared knowledge is grounded in a social theory of the self (e.g., Israel & Tajfel, 1972; Mead, 1934) and reflects an epistemological stance according to which the self is the product of social interactions. As members of organised and coordinated social and political groups, individuals are socially embedded and thus become aware of the multiple norms and principles which organise their groups. These social norms inform individuals what to expect from other group members and how to behave in social interactions. They make social life predictable and understandable, they offer political and ideological bits and pieces on the basis of which individuals make up their minds and take a stand on important social issues, they organise group life and make social groups stable (see Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Think for example of the norm of politeness prevalent in cultures of honour such as the Southern states in the U.S. (Cohen, Vandello, Puente & Rantilla, 1999) which makes interactions between group members smooth and predictable.

The idea that shared beliefs are important to understand human behaviour is of course very general and far from new (see Oishi, Kesebir & Snyder, 2009). Yet, a considerable part of the research which calls upon shared knowledge operates under the assumption that members of groups or communities come to consensually share the common knowledge in order to form a cohesive group (see for example Bar-Tal, 2000). Such a view sees group members as rather passive recipients of group norms (often disseminated by powerful elites) which they assimilate by the sole fact of being member of a given group. In early research, such a view had a distinctively communitarian flavour as the principles guiding the analysis of human behaviour were rooted in similarity with other ingroup members and in the need to justify and validate one's opinions through the support from other ingroup members (e.g., Festinger, 1954). Moscovici (1972) refers to such a view as the "psychology of the nice

person" (p.18), a psychology which considers conflict as problematic and consensus as an ideal to which group members should strive in order to enhance group cohesion and group efficacy. As was already clear in the early 1970's, such a view was the result of a social psychology which was developed in the socio-cultural context of the U.S. post-war period in which norms of similarity, assimilation, community and consensus were the organising principles of social relations (Moscovici, 1972).

In contrast to such communitarian views of shared knowledge, societal psychology inspired by a social representations approach offers a different perspective on shared knowledge (see Elcheroth, Doise & Reicher, 2011; Staerklé, 2009; Staerklé, Clémence & Spini, 2011). The emphasis on shared knowledge does not imply that all members of a group would consensually endorse the same norms and values. It is therefore not enough to account for commonalities in values and beliefs among members of social groups. Rather, it is necessary to account for debate and conflict occurring around shared knowledge. In this sense, shared knowledge provides group members merely with common references (rather than with common positionings) which allows them to communicate and debate with each other.

The idea that debate, pluralism and conflict between competing societal views are key for a societal approach to social psychology can be traced back to the seminal volume "The Context of social psychology" edited by Joachim Israel and Henri Tajfel in 1972. This book is critical of a non-social and a-theoretical social psychology which explains social phenomena with individual needs and motivations. The book therefore calls for a more social approach to social psychology, forcefully echoed in Moscovici's (1972) injunction that "the central and exclusive object of social psychology should be the study of all that pertains to *ideology* and *communication* from the point of view of their structure, their genesis and their function" (p. 55, emphasis in original). Unfortunately, following the publication of their book, their call was only partially heeded, in particular through the impressive developments of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1981) and social representations theory (Moscovici, 1961/2008, 1988). While Tajfel was less convinced of the feasibility of a "grand" theory than Moscovici, both authors deserve credit for developing a distinctively European approach to social psychology by taking seriously the fundamentally so-

cial nature of human psychology. While social identity theory created a powerful conceptual framework to understand how group membership shaped psychological processes (in particular through the categorisation process), social representations theory focused on lay thinking, communication and regulation of social interactions (see Doise, 1990). It is hardly too far-fetched to argue that outside these two traditions (and sometimes even inside them) little research within the traditional boundaries of experimental social psychology was specifically concerned with societal issues.

It seems today that the call for a more *social* social psychology has finally been heard starting in the early 1990's. We may speculate that this change had something to do with the breakdown of the East-West antagonism in 1989 which may have opened up the possibilities for a more critical and more political view on the social psychological dimensions of the organisation of Western societies. In any case, there is little doubt that during the last two decades an increasing amount of research on both sides of the Atlantic has been concerned with the justification and the challenging of social order, with the processes supporting social change and social stability, and with the social mechanisms which make inequalities, discrimination and injustice appear normal if not necessary (e.g., Jost & Major, 2001).

Yet, the field of a *social* social psychology is extremely diverse, and relies on different if not incompatible principles of human behaviour. One of the most popular and most influential approaches which has been developed during the last two decades is system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost, Banaji & Nosek, 2004). While this theory has greatly contributed to bring issues of social injustice and social inequalities to the forefront of the research agenda in social psychology, the theory has also been criticised for its static and sometimes defeatist stance since the theory is better equipped to explain the maintenance of the status quo rather than social change (see Reicher, 2004). The main thrust of the theory is indeed that members of subordinate groups would be driven by their need to rationalise inequalities in order to make their unfavourable life circumstances bearable. More generally, the approach is rooted in the tradition of motivated reasoning which seeks to explain ideological cognition and political behaviour with psychological abilities, needs, and motivations, for example uncertainty management, cognitive consistency and self-esteem (see Jost, Kay &

Thorisdottir, 2009). In this motivated cognition approach, the psychological explains the social, and the individual accounts for the collective. If the reciprocal influence between these two levels is neglected, there is a risk that political behaviour such as system justification itself or protest (or the absence thereof) becomes overly individualised if not psychologised. A similar point can be made with respect to social dominance theory which is another highly influential framework concerned with social inequalities and power relations between groups. The theory seeks to explain the existence of status hierarchies with a compelling individual-difference variable known as Social dominance orientation (Pratto et al., 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Thus, the explanation of group dominance seems ultimately to be located within individuals, even though the theory makes a point of integrating social and institutional expressions of discrimination and dominance.

A societal approach to social psychology takes a different angle as it emphasises the normative and thus social origins of human behaviour rather than its psychological origins. This normative approach is based on social representations theory (see Augoustinos, Walker & Donoghue, 2006). At the most general level, social representations are collective definitions of reality, made up by shared normative beliefs which enable communication, consent and dissent (Doise, 1990; Moscovici & Doise, 1992). Social representations are constitutive of reality, since people could not make sense of social realities and communicate and debate them without common references. Social representations are therefore not "external" to individuals in the sense that they would exert an "influence" on them. Social representations organize social relationships by providing normative reference knowledge – expressed as "values", "ideologies", or "identities" – which make up the symbolic environment of citizens. The task of societal psychology is then to investigate the links between individual cognitive functioning and the normative factors – the "meta-system" – that direct the way people think, act and interact in society (Doise, 1990; Moscovici, 1961/2008). Unlike research which seeks to uncover general and allegedly universal psychological processes, societal psychology is concerned with the study of the construction of collective meaning systems which regulate social relations (Doise & Staerklé, 2002).

Authoritarianism and self-interest as cultural norms

We will exemplify the normativity of individual attitudes and actions with a few examples which show how theoretical constructs which have initially been conceived of as individual level variables have been reinterpreted as a function of higher order processes and which thereby change the meaning of the constructs. A first example is provided by the famous fundamental attribution error (or "correspondence bias", Gilbert & Malone, 1995) which from the perspective of societal psychology is not seen as a cognitive bias resulting from a lack of information or from other individual deficiencies, but rather as the expression of collectively held values and beliefs which promote a culturally specific view of a society determined by free will and individual responsibility (Beauvois, 1994; Moscovici, 1981).

Let us further illustrate this normative view with two other examples of classical individual-level characteristics – authoritarianism and self-interest – which have been reinterpreted in the light of shared values and beliefs. Following the groundbreaking work by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson and Sanford (1950), authoritarianism has been conceived as a stable personality dimension predicting a variety of social and political outcomes. People who score high on the authoritarianism scale prefer conservative policies, support traditional gender roles, submit themselves more readily to the orders of hierarchical superiors, and develop prejudice against a variety of outgroups and minorities (Altemeyer, 1996; Duckitt, 2001). Oesterreich (2005) describes eloquently the authoritarian personality "as neurotic, antidemocratic, prejudiced, ethnocentric, aggressive, conventional, cowardly, rigid, anxious, dogmatic, stupid, demagogic, dominant, over-adapted, despotic, submissive, inhibited, etc." (p. 278). But many researchers have pointed out that the original authoritarianism paradigm is marred by epistemological, normative and methodological shortcomings. The personality view of authoritarianism has for example been criticised as being simplistic, since high authoritarianism is seen as a threat to a democratic social order, whereas low authoritarianism should lead to a social order without prejudice and conflict.

In a seminal paper which initiates a new generation of authoritarianism research, Duckitt (1989) responds to the personality view criti-

cism by suggesting that authoritarianism is best viewed as a group-level phenomenon. Noting authoritarianism's repeated failure to effectively predict interpersonal behaviour, he proposes to reinterpret authoritarianism "in a manner […] relevant to collective and intergroup behaviour, that is, in terms of individuals' group memberships and identifications" (p. 69). In this view, authoritarianism reflects the intensity of the individual's emotional identification with a given social group, such that the higher this identification, the more attached and committed the individual will be to the integrity and cohesion of that group. Therefore, high authoritarians will (a) emphasise behavioural and attitudinal conformity with ingroup norms and rules of conduct (*conventionalism*), (b) show respect and unconditional obedience to ingroup authorities and leaders (*submissiveness*), and (c) express intolerance of and punitiveness towards persons not conforming to ingroup norms (*aggression*). Through this reconceptualisation of authoritarianism as a group-level attitude, it has been freed from the conceptual problems related to its status as a stable personality dimension (see also Stellmacher & Petzel, 2005).

From a societal psychology perspective, the argument can even be taken a step further by considering authoritarianism as cultural reference knowledge created out of particular social contexts (Staerklé, 2008). Thus, when responding to different types of threat, people may refer to such knowledge in order to interpret the threatening situation and to take action on the basis of culturally available strategies and discursive resources. This view is consistent with the conjecture that social representations of authority and discipline function as shared knowledge to which people take up a position (Staerklé, 2008; 2009). Empirically, this position entails that authoritarianism should not be considered as a definitely defined personality dimension, but rather as a set of interrelated arguments and strategies which propose to regulate the social order through discipline, repression and sanction. In line with this argument, Perrin (2005) has analysed letters to the editor and has demonstrated that in the wake of 9/11 both authoritarian *and* anti-authoritarian attitudes have increased. This finding suggests that crisis and threat reinforces the use of authoritarianism as a common cultural repertoire, that is, shared knowledge to which people refer in order to cope with the threat.

Another example of a normative reinterpretation of an individualist construct is provided by Dale Miller (1999) who analyses self-interest –

the ultimate individualist motive of human behaviour – as a cultural norm. In this view, self-interest is perceived by citizens of Western societies not only as the "normal" explanation of human behavior ("everybody is self-interested"), but also as the most appropriate justification ("it's good to be self-interested"). As a result of the salience of this cultural norm in contemporary societies, people assume that altruistic behavior is most likely self-interested, and overestimate the explanatory power of self-interest of others' behaviors, while minimizing its role for justifying their own actions (Miller & Rathner, 1998). Self-interest thus refers to a widely shared assumption about the underlying explanations of human behaviour which leads people to view the world through the self-interest lens.

Values as regulatory principles of social order

One of the foremost goals of societal psychology, as inspired by social representations theory, is to overcome some of the dichotomies which have defined social psychology since its inception at the beginning of the 20th century. A social representational view requires going beyond a futile opposition between the psychological and the sociological, between the individual and the collective, or between agency and structure. These polarities imply that the individual is pitted against an incompatible collective, and that the collective – with a generally negative connotation – "influences" (or "biases") the true individual self. In a normative view of psychological functioning, however, the individual and the collective levels are not incompatible and should be articulated (see Doise, 1982): the individual is a product of social interactions and group memberships, and the cognitive and motivational processes are co-determined by group-specific, shared knowledge individuals assimilate, interiorise, and call upon in order to take up a position and act in the social world. If, for example, a sufficient number of people think of the unemployed as lazy and unmotivated, this is not just an individually held negative attitude towards an outgroup (although it is also that). More importantly, such a judgement tells us something about the society we live in. We could thus infer a number of things from this judge-

ment: it is acceptable and legitimate to think of the unemployed as lazy, it is undesirable to be unemployed, laziness is bad, while hard work and employment is good, and so on. These inferences are culture specific to the extent that the desirable values (hard work) at play in these social judgements would eventually not be understood in contexts where unemployment is less stigmatised and where the free market creed in the existential necessity of hard work is less prevalent.

Let us now look at values more closely from the perspective of societal psychology (see Staerklé, 2009). We will focus here on one particular aspect of values which is central to the issue of societal psychology, namely the *objectification* of values into useful and meaningful everyday knowledge (see Joffe & Staerklé, 2007). Many political scientists share the credo that "ordinary" people are not sophisticated enough to think in abstract and conceptual terms and that they don't really understand the philosophical underpinnings of ideological dimensions such as the left-right polarity (Converse, 1964; Feldman & Zaller, 1992). Such a conclusion is only possible when one neglects the fact that the thinking of lay people follows different rules than the thinking of experts (Moscovici & Hewstone, 1983). From a social representational perspective, values do not only appear in their abstract form in people's lives. This seems actually rather to be the exception than the rule. On the contrary, values enter people's lives through everyday communication and experience, they emerge from social life, and can be evidenced in a variety of social situations, for example when perceiving and judging others, when taking up a stance on a political candidate, or when making sense of TV news. In line with a "pragmatic imperative" of everyday thinking (Wagner & Hayes, 2005), values become objectified in order to be useful and communicable and ultimately gain the status of "cultural truisms", that is, beliefs that are widely shared and rarely questioned (Maio & Olson, 1998).

Contrary to the original conceptualisations which see values as enduring personal beliefs concerning desirable *modes of conduct* and *end states of existence* (Rokeach, 1973), the present view emphasises the shared nature of values which suggests that a personally held value is only meaningful when others also hold this value. It is the sharedness of the value, or more precisely the *awareness* that other people share this value, which makes it a common reference for individuals and thus a potential source for value-based identities. Moreover, values also guide

behaviour towards others which in turn determines the way people interact with each other. Therefore, values are also seen as normative relational models rather than as individual guiding principles, and thus are part of the symbolic devices which make coordination and social order possible.

Values obtain their political and ideological power through the fact that they assign individuals and groups a specific position in the moral and social hierarchy of the society (Staerklé, 2009). A powerful way to objectify values is to associate groups and individuals to value respect and value violation. Thereby, powerful, successful, high-status groups come to symbolise status-relevant values such as the work ethic, individualism, and motivational commitment (see Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2002), whereas perceived non-respect of these values is associated with low status groups, exemplified for example by fat people (Crandall, 1994), welfare recipients (Gilens, 1999), or women and Blacks in the U.S. (Biernat, Vescio, Theno & Crandall, 1996; Federico & Sidanius, 2002; Reyna, Henry, Korfmacher & Tucker, 2005). Thereby, values implicitly incorporate stereotypical images of those groups who are seen to conform to important values and those groups who are thought to violate these same values, a process termed *judgemental value expression* by Henry and Reyna (2007). These examples lead us to conclude that values are a central concept to analyse the normative regulation of social relations. Values organise social relations and at a higher level of generality they participate in maintaining or justifying social order.

The model of lay conceptions of social order

In an attempt to integrate psychological and social regulation in a single framework, we have developed a heuristic model which features four lay conceptions of social order (Staerklé, Delay, Gianettoni & Roux, 2007a; Staerklé, 2009). This model aspires to account for the interplay between individual-cognitive and social-ideological factors in political lay thinking. The main idea is that there is a correspondence between, on the one hand, the ways a social group or a society is organised in terms of the principles regulating its social order, and, on the other hand,

the psychological processes and the cognitive operations used to sustain a given social order. This is then a form of homology between social and cognitive regulation (Bourdieu, 1979; Doise et al., 1993).

Here, we only outline the model of lay conceptions of social order which is described in more detail elsewhere (Staerklé et al., 2007a; Staerklé, 2009). The model takes heed of the fact that in democratic societies the principles underlying social order are debated and contested by both citizens and political actors. Accounting for political attitudes with conceptions of social order therefore requires a pluralistic approach based on multiple definitions of social order. The four normative models of social order are called *Moral Order, Free Market, Social Diversity* and *Structural Inequality*. These conceptions represent four simplified ways of organizing a society, along with their main modes of institutional regulation. To each of these four political models are associated specific social psychological processes, for example conformism or intergroup differentiation. This model is thus an attempt at systematising plural collective meaning systems into a single framework which simultaneously describes political and psychological processes. It further proposes a structure of political ideologies, describes stereotype content of groups as a function of ideological values (see Joffe & Staerklé, 2007), and associates political meaning to psychological processes and perceptions. Each of the four conceptions of social order is furthermore characterised with specific threats a society has to cope with. Let us now look briefly at these conceptions.

(1) In the *Moral Order* conception, the social order is based on expected endorsement of common moral principles. Accordingly, an orderly society is threatened by norm-violating people such as drug addicts and deviants who disrespect central moral values (as evidenced in conservative statements of lacking moral education and urban insecurity). The psychological process which sustains a moral order is conformism, and authoritarianism, understood as an ideological dimension regulating social relations, captures individual positionings towards this form of social order.

(2) In the *Free Market* conception, the social order is based on economically liberal principles. Here, the social order is challenged by people who violate free market principles by allegedly abusing common goods (as expressed in perceived "free riding" and bene-

fit abuse by welfare beneficiaries). In this view, welfare abuse becomes a political problem and authorities are seen as not protecting the rights and assets of hard-working people. The processes to uphold this form of social order are equity-based forms of distributive justice judgements and the belief in self-interest as a fundamental human motivation. Scales involving the protestant work ethic and other free market beliefs may capture positionings towards this conception of social order.

(3) In the *Social Diversity* conception, social order is based on subgroup differentiation within national groups, in particular between ethnic or cultural minority and majority groups. This differentiation is either positively (as in multicultural societies), or negatively evaluated (as in societies where discrimination of minority groups is frequent and legitimate). Hence, the social order is either threatened by racism and discrimination (in the case of positive diversity), or by cultural diversity and otherness (in the case of negative diversity). In this latter case, individuals endorse the principle of national homogeneity, they perceive immigrants and foreigners as a threat and their existence as such becomes a political problem. The cognitive process at work in this conception is intergroup differentiation on which intergroup tolerance and recognition (on the positive side) and discrimination and racism (on the negative side) are based.

(4) In *the Structural Inequality* conception, finally, the social order is based on egalitarian principles which are either rejected or supported. When egalitarian principles are rejected, the social order is dominated by powerful elite groups which control and eventually exploit subordinate groups. Social dominance orientation captures such a view of social order. When egalitarian principles are supported, in turn, inequalities between dominant and subordinate groups are minimised, in line for example with social-democratic doctrines. This conception then features the intergroup power relationship between dominant and subordinate groups. In an egalitarian social order, the threat stems from social inequality and from social distance between privileged and underprivileged social categories. In a hierarchical social order, however, groups promoting egalitarian principles (e. g., trade unions, "communists") are perceived as threatening. The processes operating in this conception concern the justification, or the refusal thereof, of social inequalities.

This model is appropriate for both the objectification and the anchoring sides of societal psychology. By describing the normative content of shared knowledge and proposing a model through which abstract ideologies are transformed into useful everyday knowledge, the model is relevant for analyses of objectification. By providing a priori defined dimensions – organising principles – which organise social relations and on which individuals and groups differ, the model is also pertinent for anchoring analyses. In the next section, we sketch out examples of the anchoring and the contextualisation of psychological processes based on the model. We first describe how conceptions of social order are anchored in low and high-status positions and how these conceptions account for trust in political authorities. We then report research on attitudes towards government responsibility across different national contexts and conclude with a survey study on minority-majority differences in national attitudes.

Anchoring of attitudes towards social rights and welfare institutions

The anchoring process is most easily evidenced with the analysis of individual- and group-level variation of positionings towards shared knowledge. For example, differences in political attitudes between social categories reflect differences in social experiences which are assumed to be determined by positions in the social hierarchy (Clémence, 2001; Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2002; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Groups operate as norm-generating collectives which give rise to normative beliefs and values dealing with everyday experiences and contingencies; group members then draw on such shared knowledge – social representations – to form political attitudes. Political attitudes such as trust in institutions are then seen as the outcome of a process whereby citizens position themselves toward shared normative knowledge (Scheidegger & Staerklé, 2011). Social representations can therefore be defined as normative organizing principles of political attitudes (Bourdieu, 1979; Doise, 2001; Doise, Clémence & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1993).

In a Swiss survey study on the legitimacy of the welfare state (Gianettoni, Simon-Vermot, Staerklé, Roux & Delay, 2010; Staerklé et al., 2007a; Scheidegger & Staerklé, 2011), we have shown that the feeling of political powerlessness and low levels of education predicted normative beliefs concerning a society threatened by immorality and delinquency (moral order threat), by free-riders and welfare abuse (free market threat), by immigrants and otherness in general (social diversity threat) and by social inequalities (structural inequality threat). It can therefore be suggested that membership in low status groups generates greater uncertainty and vulnerability, while giving rise to stronger perceptions of social problems and a more pessimistic outlook on society (see Castel, 1995). Low status groups therefore experience greater threat to social order on all four dimensions. They tend to perceive an unfair, disorganised, and dangerous world in which authorities and institutions fail, or have failed, to bring about a better society. It could also be that such a perception allows materially vulnerable people to see themselves on the good side of society and thus to compensate to some extent the potential social stigma associated with financial hardship. Material risk furthermore produces perceptions of illegitimate inequality which suggests that one's own experience of financial difficulties raises the awareness of the existence of wider inequalities, and thus of the idea that one is not alone in this situation (Staerklé, Delay, Gianettoni & Roux 2007b).

In another recent study, we employed data from the *European Social Survey IV* on 28 European countries in order to test the structure of the model in an international context and to analyse the various anchoring patterns across social groups (Staerklé, Likki & Scheidegger, 2011. Based on the idea that political thinking is shaped by widespread normative beliefs individuals refer to when taking a stance towards welfare policies and government responsibility, we were able to show how various conceptions of social order – authoritarianism, distrust, welfare dependency, ethnocentrism and egalitarianism – functioned as strategies to define the moral boundaries and psychological processes of inclusion and exclusion with regard to government responsibility and the protection of social rights.

The findings of this study suggest that the four-dimensional structure proposed by the model of lay-conceptions of social order (Moral order, Free market, Social diversity, and Structural inequality) was relevant and applicable to comparative international data. These conceptions

are assumed to reflect different strategies of differentiation which give rise to different types of cleavages in society. The results further confirm earlier findings from the Swiss study by showing that low levels of education were consistently associated with greater perceived threat to the social order, in terms of immorality, free-riding, threatening diversity and social inequality. This finding suggests that people with a higher level of education are less prone to differentiate people either on a normative or a categorical basis. Put otherwise, social cleavages seem to be more salient for low rather than high status people. Material vulnerability, in turn, was less uniformly related to normative beliefs. While ethnocentrism and egalitarianism were more endorsed by materially vulnerable people, they endorsed less the welfare dependency norm which considers welfare to lead to a loss of moral responsibility and social commitment.

Regarding the relationship between conceptions of social order and government responsibility, we found that perceiving society as a place in which respect of rules should be improved, people cannot be trusted, where ethnic diversity is a threat, and in which social equalities are not met, favours a demand for greater welfare state responsibility and inequality reduction by the government. Such perceptions are typically observed among members of low status groups.

One of the key aims of this research was to explain the contextual, country-level variation of these normative beliefs as organizing principles of government responsibility in social issues. This measure thus assesses the extent to which individuals support a government-based welfare state based on collective responsibility. With appropriate multilevel analyses, we found that the conceptions of social order did not have the same meaning and the same weight as predictors of government responsibility depending on the national contexts. The negative effects of ethnocentrism and perceived welfare dependency on welfare support were stronger in countries with relatively higher levels of welfare spending and lower levels of unemployment such as Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany and Sweden than in countries with weak welfare states and high levels of unemployment such as Estonia, Latvia, Romania, Russian Federation and Turkey. This result suggests that while on an absolute level ethnocentrism and prejudice is lower in West European countries than in East European countries, the reverse seems to be true when it comes to the predictive role of prejudice: Nega-

tive attitudes towards immigrants predict lower support for government involvement only in relatively wealthy Western European countries, while no such relationship was observed in other countries. This finding suggests that the political function of prejudice is to exclude immigrants from relatively extensive welfare coverage. Other results indicate that the *positive* effects of authoritarianism on government support were stronger in countries with *low* levels of welfare spending than in countries with higher welfare spending. This finding in turn suggests that in Eastern countries authoritarianism is firmly associated with a desire for a strong government taking care of its citizens. In Western countries, however, this relationship is much weaker.

These findings point towards the importance of cross-level interactions (between individual and country-level variables) in understanding the perceived legitimacy of institutional intervention. The impact of country-level characteristics such as social expenditure on opinions and attitudes can thus not only be observed with different country means (with rather mixed evidence in the literature), but also with different weights of normative beliefs in the construction of welfare attitudes across countries. Put otherwise, the organizing principles of institutional attitudes vary as a function of national contexts. In sum, the approach advocated in this research highlighted the fact that the construction of political attitudes is shaped by the social and normative contexts in which they are enacted.

Anchoring of national attitudes by ethnic minorities and majorities

A final example of how context moderates social psychological processes is provided by another research which focuses on ethnic minorities and majorities in 33 countries around the world (Staerklé, Sidanius, Green & Molina, 2010). In this study, we were interested in knowing in which national contexts majorities were more strongly identified with the nation and supported more fervently nationalist ideologies than national minorities (excluding immigrants without citizenship). The re-

sults showed that both ethnic diversity within a country and low levels of inequality (that is, highly developed welfare states) increased the difference between minorities and majorities in terms of national identification and nationalism, while no difference between minorities and majorities was found in high inequality and ethnically more homogeneous contexts. Equality (rather than inequality) and cultural diversity thus seem to fuel minority-majority differences in terms of their relationship with the nation.

Another issue concerned the relationship between ethnic (subgroup) and national (superordinate) identification for minorities and majorities. While we found a strong overall effect according to which majorities establish a much stronger link between identification with their ethnic group and the national group (e.g., the more White, the more American) compared to minorities. This effect was moderated in particular by country-level equality (i.e., strong welfare states). Indeed, we observed that country-level *equality* fuelled the relationship between ethnic identification and both national identification and nationalism for majorities, while for minorities this relationship was weaker in egalitarian contexts. Overall, the findings suggest that the differences between ethnic minorities and majorities in terms of national attitudes were strongest for citizens who were highly identified with their ethnic groups in highly developed, ethnically homogeneous and egalitarian, welfare-state based national contexts. These results point towards a stronger, majority-defined ethnic conception of the nation-state in countries with a strong welfare state tradition, founded on the primacy of social rights and on the egalitarian redistribution of resources (in our dataset for example Denmark, Germany, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic). This result can be seen in light of research on the relationship between cultural diversity and economic redistribution which has shown that a strong welfare state calls for the definition of clear boundaries between national citizens who are entitled to benefits and those who are not (see Alesina & Glaeser, 2004; Banting & Kymlicka, 2006). Our results may indirectly reflect such a political strategy which consists of demarcating the circle of beneficiaries by membership in the ethnic majority group.

Conclusion

This chapter proposed an illustrated overview of societal psychology. Two broad criteria derived from a social representational approach were defined which seem essential for a societal psychology. The first criterion, roughly corresponding to the objectification process, emphasises a normative approach to psychological processes which should be analysed and understood in relation to collective meaning systems. On the group level, these meaning systems organise and regulate the relations between individuals and groups within societies. On the individual level, they provide citizens with "lenses" through which they perceive and explain the social environment around them, and through which they are able to take action in order to shape the social order according to their goals. The model of lay conceptions of social order puts into perspective four emblematic collective meaning systems which are assumed to constitute major types of reference knowledge in contemporary pluralist societies.

The second criterion concerns the anchoring of social knowledge. Attitudes and opinions reflect in complex ways the social contexts in which they have been developed. Individuals do not passively take up normative knowledge of their groups. They rather refer dynamically and through their own agency to such knowledge in order to take up a position towards a social issue. We would therefore argue in favour of a social representations approach which takes into account the dynamic and changing nature of representations, which highlights the debated and often contested nature of shared knowledge, and which is grounded in intergroup power relations and communication processes between minorities and majorities (Staerklé, Clémence & Spini, 2011).

Such a view of social representations is consistent with analyses in political theory which are based on the idea that politics is an endless struggle between social categories (such as political parties), aimed at associating specific meanings to abstract concepts (Mouffe, 1993). The meanings of "democracy", "human rights", "freedom", or "justice", to take but a few examples, are not, and never will be defined in a universally accepted way. Instead, social regulations and complex systems of interaction shape the way people interpret these abstract principles. A democratic functioning of a political community is therefore necessar-

ily characterized by antagonistic positionings towards socially relevant topics, that is, social representations.

Societal psychology is also more centred on social objects rather than on psychological processes as such. This has a number of implications. It suggests for example that many antagonisms which structure the field of social psychology, for example between "psychological" and "sociological" approaches, between "applied" and "fundamental" research, or between "qualitative" and "quantitative" methods, are not always relevant and can be overcome. It further relies on methodological eclecticism and does not shy away from attempts at interdisciplinary integration, for example with sociology, political science or history. Meaning regulation systems are not stable and immutable shared knowledge structures, but are transformed as a function of historical events, challenged by actives minorities, and altered by political projects at all levels. Societal psychology is thus concerned with processes of social change and social stability, and thereby contributes to a social psychological analysis of citizenship.

Societal psychology is also an invitation to look back at some classical theory and research in social psychology. During the first part of the 20th century, authors like Baldwin, Vygotsky and Mead were integrating individual and collective levels of analysis (see Farr, 1996). Then, in the early times of modern social psychology after WW2, researchers were driven by their quest for answers for pressing social issues, in particular in the wake of the holocaust. Both these features – the integration of individual and collective levels of analysis and the focus on "real-world" problems – are central a societal approach to social psychology. It is therefore more than worthwhile to go back to some of the founding work of social psychology, for example social behaviourism (Mead, 1934) and social perception (Sherif, 1935), intergroup relations and field theory (Lewin, Lippitt & White, 1939), conformism and group pressure (Asch, 1955), realistic intergroup conflict (Sherif & Sherif, 1953), and many others. In a way, societal psychology revisits the roots of social psychology, while taking stock of the enormous theoretical, methodological and statistical advancements of the discipline since those early times. That is, it goes back to new roots.

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