Social Representations and the Politics of Participation

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Recent work has called for the integration of different perspectives into the field of political

psychology (e.g., Haste, 2012). This chapter suggests that one possible direction that such

efforts can take is studying the role that social representations theory can play in

understanding political participation and social change. Social representations are systems of

common-sense knowledge and social practice; they provide the lens through which to view

and create social and political realities, mediate people's relations with these socio-political

worlds and defend cultural and political identities. Social representations are therefore key for

conceptualising participation as the activity that locates individuals and social groups in their

socio-political world. Political participation is generally seen as conditional to membership of

socio-political groups and therefore is often linked to citizenship. To be a citizen of a society

or a member of any social group one has to participate as such. Often political participation is

defined as the ability to communicate one's views to the political elite or to the political

establishment (Uhlaner, 2001), or simply explicit involvement in politics and electoral

processes (Milbrath, 1965). However, following scholars on ideology (Thompson, 1990;

Eagleton, 1991) and social knowledge (Jovchelovitch, 2007), we extend our understanding of

political participation to all social relations and also develop a more agentic model where

individuals and groups construct, develop and resist their own views, ideas and beliefs. We

thus adopt a broader approach to participation in comparison to other political psychology

approaches, such as personality approaches (e.g. Mondak and Halperin, 2008) and cognitive

approaches, or more recently, neuropsychological approaches (Hatemi and McDermott,

2012). We move away from a focus on the individual's political behaviour and its antecedents

and outline an approach that focuses on the interaction between psychological and political phenomena (Deutch and Kinnwall, 2002) through examining the politics of social knowledge.

Participation, therefore, is more than the communication of views, through for example voting or other explicitly 'political' behaviour such as working on political campaigns; participation can be conceptualised as *the power to construct and convey particular representations over others*. In other words, it refers to the symbolic power to construct legitimate social knowledge, norms and identities, and to disregard, marginalise or silence alternative ways of knowing and being. This type of power is typically afforded to groups of higher socio-political status who have the power to construct what is 'real' or 'true'. However, in contrast to Durkheim's 'collective representations', social representations are dynamic systems of knowledge and as such, are always potentially open to challenge and negotiation. Social representations are never completely fixed, even though they can be hegemonic and so support systems of ideology; they nonetheless allow for resistance and agency through the active re-appropriation of existing knowledge and identity positions. Therefore, the theory of social representations is able to explain both established patterns of social and political relations and the possibility for shifting unequal patterns of participation, challenging the politics of identity and achieving social change.

This chapter is divided into four parts: the first lays out social representations theory (SRT); the second highlights the ways in which SRT offers a contextualised and dynamic approach to the politics of participation; the third part examines the role of recognition in shaping the participation of different social groups; the final part explores the possibilities for agency and resistance in contexts of contested participation. We conclude with a discussion of the benefits of incorporating social representations theory into Political Psychology.

What are social representations?

Social representations are 'ways of world making' (Moscovici, 1988). They are localised systems of meaning (Jovchelovitch, 2007) which are constructed through communicative practices within and across social groups and enable the communities that produce them to make sense of their social world and position themselves within this world. Social representations are evident in all forms of social and political interactions – from everyday debates in local cafes and pubs (Moscovici, 1976), to television programmes and media debates (Rose, 1996), scientific discourses (O'Connor, Rees and Joffe, 2012) and laws and policies (Castro, 2012; Andreouli and Howarth, 2012). Serge Moscovici, who first developed this concept in 1961, characterised social representations in this way:

> Social representations … concern the contents of everyday thinking and the
> stock of ideas that gives coherence to our religious beliefs, political ideas and
> the connections we create as spontaneously as we breathe. They make possible
> for us to classify persons and objects, to compare and explain behaviours and to
> objectify them as parts of our social setting (Moscovici, 1988, p. 214).

Social representations are simultaneously social and individual. On the one hand, they are constructed in social interaction and can be embedded in rather stable social structures, but on the other hand, they are individual because they shape individual cognition and thinking. As Farr notes, social representations are "'in the world' as well as being in the 'head'" (1987, p. 359). What differentiates social representations from individualising theories of cognition is the emphasis on communication in cognitive development or more generally, the construction

of knowledge (Psaltis and Duveen, 2006, 2007). Knowledge is not seen as the outcome of simple information processing but as the outcome of self-other interaction which, in turn, is shaped by existing social relations (e.g. asymmetric or equal). We see here that, in line with cultural psychological perspectives (Vygotsky, 1978), individual cognition is bound with societal circumstances.

From its very beginning social representations theory was a theory about the politics of knowledge, social relations and social change. Social representations enable dialogue and argumentation; they support community identities and fuel intergroup conflicts; they inform the politics of the everyday and the normative politics of legal, institutional and policy debates. Moscovici (1998) once described social representations as 'the battle of ideas', demonstrating that ideas and knowledge practices are always located in a particular social perspective, and so develop and defend particular social identities and positions in intergroup relations (Staerklé, Clémence and Spini, 2011). This becomes particularly evident in super-diverse societies (Vertovec, 2007) whereby different social, cultural, religious or other groups advance different, sometimes conflicting, versions of social reality. The construction of social representations, therefore, is never disinterested. It is a political project (Howarth, 2006), guided by the interests, goals and activities of the groups that produce them within a given intergroup context (Bauer and Gaskell, 1999, 2008). Furthermore, as ideas translate into social practices, they not only help us understand social and material realities, but they construct these realities – in ways that support or contest social relations and therefore systems of inclusion, exclusion and power (Howarth, 2004; O'Sullivan-Lago, 2011). While SRT clearly sits within the original vision of social constructionism (Berger and Luckmann, 1967), we can characterise this theory as being more about the *political* construction of realities and social relations (Elcheroth, Doise and Reicher, 2011).

While Durkheim (1898) saw representations as collective, coercive and even 'total', operating as social facts, Moscovici's proposal allows for movement, complexity, resistance in a more dynamic version of social representations. In this vein, social representations can never be seen as 'neutral' or 'static' (Marková, 2008, p. 466) and this means that SRT is equipped to deal with the heterogeneity (Gergen, 1991), intersectionality (Brah and Phoenix, 2004) and polyphasia of contemporary knowledge systems, intercultural relations and social identities (Howarth, Wagner, Magnusson and Sammut, 2013). Representations are located within particular histories and contexts, they form the normative expectations of particular communities, broader social groups and nations but they also evolve in a constant process of social re-presentation. As we are continually reconstructing the past in terms of the present (Mead, 1934), weaving contemporary concerns into our social histories, this process of re-presentation is to be expected.

Thus, in the process of shaping the context and events within which they emerge, representations transform. It is not that each representation changes entirely in every social interaction. As Duveen and Lloyd (1986) insist, social representations have a "relative resistance to individual modification" (p.221). There are representations which appear to have substantial durability and are resistant to competing forms: these are collective or 'hegemonic' representations (Moscovici, 1998), such as individualism (Farr, 1991) and race (Howarth, 2009). Hegemonic representations, similar to ideologies, are comparatively unchanging over time and so are almost completely dominated by a central nucleus of ideas (Abric, 1993). Other representations, particularly those that oppose the dominant order, are more contested and so more reactive to peripheral elements (ibid). However even hegemonic representations should not be seen as simply uniform systems of belief or ideology, as Staerklé *et al* (2011) point out:

Such shared and common points of reference are necessary for meaningful

communication. However this does not mean that all group members would share

the same knowledge. … Because social representations are elaborated through

discussion and debate, individuals *anchor* such common reference points in the

normative perspectives of their own groups (Staerklé *et al*, 2011, p. 761).

The *reactive* and *transformative* nature of social representations is not something to be

problematised (Jahoda, 1988) or minimised (Potter and Litton, 1985); this must be worked

with, not against, as such reactivity and transformative potential are the essence of the worlds

we live in and the politics of the projects we construct (Foster, 2011).

Indeed some representations are particularly dynamic and reactive to social and political

contexts. These include what Moscovici defines as emancipated and polemical

representations (Moscovici, 1988; Duveen, 2008). The former are "the outgrowth of the

circulation of knowledge and ideas belonging to subgroups". The latter are "generated in the

course of social conflict, social controversy and society as a whole does not share them"

(Moscovici, 2000, p. 28). These different types of social representations embody and define

the experience of reality, determining its boundaries, its significance and its relationships

(Purkhardt, 1993). Social representations therefore both extend and limit possibilities. They

naturalise and legitimise relations of domination *and* challenge the status-quo and stimulate

innovation (Castro and Batel, 2008; Castro, 2012). It is this dynamic relationship between

stability and change that makes social representations theory particularly appropriate for the

study of social change and participation.

Social representations as political participation

The ways that people participate in social and political life can take many different forms, as different contexts are characterised by different 'cultures of participation' (Haste, 2004). For example, in the UK, concern over young people's political 'apathy' led to the establishment of citizenship education in all schools as a mandatory subject of the national curriculum (Advisory Group on Citizenship, 1998). In Senegal, Tunisia, Mozambique, and South Africa, young people have become actively engaged in civic activism through popular culture in response to their disenchantment and/or exclusion from government and party politics (Honwana, 2012). Hence, it seems that while young people are disillusioned with mainstream forms of participation, they are instead more engaged with 'glocal' politics (O'Toole and Gale, 2010). They can be engaged in the politics of identity and actively involved in developing alternate representations of community and nationality in local community projects (Howarth, Wagner, Nicholson and Sammut, 2013).

Different contexts can open up or close down possibilities for participation. For example, migrants' legitimacy to participate in the construction of knowledge about Britishness depends on the particular political context in terms of both formal immigration laws and policies and lay representations of immigration. It has been shown for example, that 'elite' Western migrants are more readily recognised as similar and equal and have thus more entitlement to become part of the nation compared to 'non-elite', non-Western migrants (Andreouli and Howarth, 2012; Andreouli, 2013). By being recognised in their social context (by dominant others and powerful institutions), they are able to participate in processes of 'imagining' the national community (Anderson, 1991). Similar results have been found in other contexts. Ali and Sonn (2010) discuss how, in Australia, dominant social representations of the 'authentic' white Australian limit the ability of ethnic minorities to take

part in the construction of the nation and perpetuate the status quo of white privilege. Equally, in the Greek context, it has been shown that ethnic representations of national identity exclude ethnic minorities from the national 'we' (Chryssochoou, 2009; Kadianaki, 2010). Through constructing different ethnic identities as incompatible, such ethnic representations of nations create a dichotomy between cohesion and multiculturalism (Chryssochoou and Lyons, 2011). However, equal participation of ethnic minorities in the social and political life of a country depends on the adoption of multicultural policies (Kymlicka, 2010) as well as the development of more inclusive representations of 'us' involving groups previously seen as different, as O'Sullivan-Lago's (2011) research in Ireland shows. More generally, it can be argued that negative representations of intergroup difference legitimise a social order that privileges the majority (Staerklé, 2009) and thus reduce the participation of minorities.

We see similar processes in other settings. In the current global order, people's ability to participate in social and political life is often determined by North-South development relations and discourses (Campbell and Cornish, 2010). The dominant or powerful institutions and practices of development tend to represent marginalised communities as recipients of development interventions rather than people with agency and the ability to participate in (and create) social change. As development interventions promote access to resources in marginalised communities, these also construct knowledge about the people who inhabit these spaces. Through stigmatising representations of global poverty (Dogra, 2012), recognition and expertise are most often attributed to Western economic and cultural practices (Kothari, 2006; Jovchelovitch, 2007). More recent strategies in development do recognise these critiques and focus on empowerment, community mobilization, and participation. However, the more ambivalent and contradictory representations of development continue to be mediated by racialised and gendered discourses (Kessi, 2011), mirroring the ongoing cultural effects of colonial history (Dogra, 2012).

Recent political unrest in Senegal and Tunisia have brought forth alternative forms of participation. Through the Hip Hop movement and social media, young people have gained legitimacy through slogans that touch directly upon their sense of belonging in the national culture: "I don't feel Senegalese anymore…" (Honwana, 2012, p.119) and "Tunisia Our Country" (ibid, p.123) are the lyrics of popular rap artists condemning the authoritarianism and corruption of political regimes and indicate the central preoccupation that representations of *belonging to the nation* take through quite different forms of participation.

Hence, political psychology should take social context and culture seriously in its understanding of participation (Haste, 2012). Following this line of reasoning and similar recent work in the field (e.g., Elcheroth, *et al* 2011), we propose a conceptualisation of political participation which is sensitive to the contexts, dynamics and specifics of intergroup relations as these are reflected in processes of re-presentation. We suggest that SRT offers both a contextualised and a dynamic approach to the politics of participation.

Political participation is often linked to membership of a polity as citizenship is seen to provide the conditions for having and exercising political rights. According to Marshall's (1964) model of citizenship, participation refers to the *political* rights of citizenship, complemented by *social* rights such as welfare, and *civil* rights such as liberty and freedom of speech. However, depicting participation as an extension of one's formal citizenship status, limits our understanding of processes of inclusion and exclusion to issues of formal membership, such as ethnic and civic participation (Kohn, 1944). As Andreouli and Howarth (2012) have shown, recognition is not only a matter of state institutions, but also a matter of lay social relationships and interactions. Naturalised citizens, for example, can be formally included in the polity and be entitled to full membership rights, but their position within the social representations of the nation may remain precarious (ibid). The same seems to be true

for minoritised groups, such as African Americans (Philogène, 2007), German Muslims (Holtz, Danhinden and Wagner, 2013), gay Muslims in the UK (Jaspal, 2012) and black lesbians in South Africa (Mkhize et al., 2010). In global politics, despite the existence of legitimate transnational institutions defending the rights of marginalised groups, sex worker groups (Blankenship et al. 2010) and people affected by HIV/AIDS (Campbell et al., 2012) amongst others, nevertheless struggle to exercise control in representational and decision-making practices.

Indeed, this state-centric model of political participation has been criticised for being too narrowly focused on mainstream forms of participation, such as voting and standing for office, ignoring other informal arenas where politics are enacted, especially by young people (O'Toole et al., 2003), women (Fraser, 1989) and marginalised communities (Mirza and Reay, 2000). Contemporary multicultural and transnational societies have become sites of multiple types of participation, not all of them linked to official parliamentary politics (Soysal, 1994). New social movements (Wieviorka, 2005) have led to new forms of political participation and mobilisation (Stott and Reicher, 2012), focusing for example on the domain of culture (Nash, 2001), religion (Modood, 2010) or gender (Phillips, 2009). These identity politics call for a new understanding of participation, one that is not limited to the official political sphere. In fact, as Nash (2001) argues, we should not just study the relations between state and society, but all social life must be seen as potentially political (p. 77). This parallels the approach to SRT outlined here that focuses on the *political* construction of lay social knowledge systems and social relations.

We define *participation as the power to construct and convey particular representations over others.* It is essentially about having the power to construct social representations which as Moscovici has argued, are "ways of world making" (1988, p. 231). Powerful groups have the

ability to define social reality by participating more fully in the construction of social representations. In societies where asymmetric power relations are uncontested or even legitimate (Tajfel, 1981), hegemonic representations become normative and permeate habitual ways of thinking and engaging with others. It has been shown, for example, that minority groups may hold attitudes that justify the status quo and are thus contrary to their group interests (Jost and Banaji, 1994; Jost, Banaji and Nosek, 2004; Jost, 2011). Being unable to participate equates to lacking the agency to construct social reality in one's own terms, in ways that promote the interests and projects of one's various social groups. Minoritised groups often lack the symbolic power to institute their version of the world over others; as a result, they are 'forced' to accept or live by representations constructed by others. Social representations have therefore consequences beyond the immediate context of their production. For example, dominant essentialising representations of Britishness do not only function to create the national group as 'insiders'; they also function to exclude others, such as migrants, particularly racialised migrants who thereby cannot easily participate in the definition of the nation. As Haste has argued, to "become involved requires that one has a sense of ownership of the issue, that one defines oneself as a member of a group or as a holder of particular beliefs" (Haste, 2004, p. 433).

However, dominant representations can potentially be resisted by active minorities that offer an alternative perspective that they strive to legitimise through strategies of social influence (Moscovici, 1985; Sammut and Bauer, 2011). These representations can be described as polemical (Moscovici, 1988) as they are in conflict with dominant representations and portray an alternative version of the world. Overall, we can see that participation is essentially about power and agency. It is an inherently political process as it is framed by power and structural

relations and has to do with the possibilities to maintain or challenge these relations, that is, possibilities for agency and resistance in the on-going processes of participation.

In connecting social representations and participation, two key issues are particularly important:

1.   The role of (mis)recognition in shaping the dynamics of social relations and constraining or advancing the participation of different social groups
2.   The possibilities for agency and resistance which enable disadvantaged groups to participate

The role of (mis)recognition in participation

Political participation is not just a citizen's membership status but the ability to act as a citizen, to participate in the social life of a community. We can thus conceptualise participation and citizenship as practice (Isin and Wood, 1999; Barnes, Auburn and Lea, 2004) that embeds us within certain intergroup relations and identity politics. Practice refers to performing 'acts of citizenship': "those deeds by which actors constitute themselves (and others) as subjects of rights" (Isin, 2009, p. 371). In this sense, political participation is not restricted to those who hold the status of citizenship, but to everyone who can make political claims in the public sphere (ibid.). Therefore, when considering the meaning of participation, the question is not 'who is a citizen' but 'who is an actor', or rather, 'who is *recognised* as a legitimate political actor'. The next logical question to follow being: what or whom determines who is a competent political actor?

Being an actor is not a matter of individual traits but a matter of social recognition. On the one hand, this is defined by existing norms and institutions, such as the state itself. For example, in Western democracies young people under the age of eighteen are not allowed to vote, indicating that they are not seen to be as politically competent. On the other hand, who is considered competent enough to have a valid political voice is subject to public debate (Gibson and Hamilton, 2011). Such processes of social recognition, both at the level of the state and also in public debate, are shaped by the social representations that mediate patterns of communication established between different social actors (Andreouli and Howarth, 2012; Psaltis, 2005). This is evident in stigmatising representations of 'others' which limit their ability to institute their version of the world. Gender asymmetries and lack of recognition of women's 'epistemic authority', for example, limit their participation in the knowledge construction process (Psaltis and Duveen, 2006). The symbolic exclusion of 'cultural others' in institutionalised discourses within school curricula can similarly lead to disengaged identities and barriers in communication and participation at school (Howarth, 2004). Thus social representations which misrecognise minoritised groups have a negative impact on their ability to participate in the public sphere (Hopkins and Blackwood, 2011). Social representations can therefore be equally constraining as tangible exclusionary mechanisms.

However while social representations can work in ways that close down the possibilities of participation, we can also see social representations as an instrument of participation:

> It is the process of participation that forms the on-going arena that allows social representations to be expressed, reaffirmed, and if necessary, renegotiated. Participation involves the processes of negotiation of worldviews and projects. It provides a forum for the establishment of dialogues between different representations… and for the clashes between competing representations and

projects. … It is here that we need to consider the power differential between communities since not all projects and representations are equally recognised in the public arena" (Campbell and Jovchelovitch, 2000, p. 266).

Who can participate in the knowledge construction process depends on intergroup dynamics. For example, polemical and emancipated representations reflect more heterogeneous social systems whereby different communities participate in the construction of different versions of their social worlds. It all depends on the level and quality of dialogue that is developed among groups. While dialogical encounters allow for the construction of hybrid and pluralistic representations, non-dialogical relations construct a hierarchy of knowledge, such that the knowledge produced by more powerful groups acquires more validity than the knowledge constructed by dominated groups (Jovchelovitch, 2007). This is most evident in hegemonic representations which reflect social relations that are characterised by high asymmetry. These types of social representations are rarely challenged; they resemble Durkheim's collective representations in that they are based on the power of belief, not on argument or knowledge (Marková, 2003, Duveen, 2002). Hegemonic representations or normative systems do not simply operate within the reified sphere of the law and policy (Batel and Castro, 2009), but the "normative system moves from the macro to the micro level and becomes effective in personal relationships" (Moghaddam, 2008, p. 894). Such representations are often taken for granted, unreflectively reproduced in everyday routines and habits and often reified and institutionalised through objectification (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). Billig (1995) argues that nationhood is one such representation. Indeed, the idea that nations are imagined, constructed artefacts (Anderson, 1991) is rarely acknowledged or reflected upon; rather people, even in conditions of super-diversity (Vertovec, 2007), largely represent nationals and non-nationals as 'naturally' different groups of people. This social representation is also

institutionalised through state policies, and objectified in very tangible national borders which create a physical distinction between 'us' and 'them', enforcing essentialising representations of nationhood. Social representations can therefore potentially become powerful norms (Castro 2012), acquiring a truth status, and therefore blocking negotiation and dialogue. As Moscovici (1976, p. 69) has argued:

> The activities of society as a whole, or of a group, always result in the establishment of a norm and the consolidation of a majority response. Once such a norm and response have been elaborated, behaviours, opinions, the means of satisfying needs, and in fact all possible social acts are divided into four categories: what is permitted, and what is forbidden; what is included and what is excluded.

Therefore, inasmuch as social representations allow for contestation, it is important to also acknowledge the mechanisms by which this contestation is blocked. Stigma that misrecognises the perspective of the other is one such mechanism (Gillespie, 2008). This is evident within the micro-discursive contexts of interpersonal interactions (Psaltis and Duveen, 2006), the broadly institutionalised contexts of schools (Howarth, 2004), as well as across more global and hegemonic systems of representations of global development. Such mis-recognition of the perspective of the other can even be instrumental for minimising the impact of laws explicitly devised for stimulating participation (Castro and Batel, 2008). For instance Kessi (2011) demonstrates how, in a participatory youth development project, the popular and stigmatising representations of communities as lazy, ignorant and irresponsible were both resisted and reproduced by young people whose agency was undermined in the face of these widespread and imposing images of poverty and underdevelopment. Hence, participation in

certain contexts can reproduce unequal relations when groups are unable to exercise their agency and be fully recognised in their social and political environments. Equally, and particularly relevant for Political Psychology, empirical research such as Kessi (2011) shows that resistance is an importance aspect of participation.

Possibilities for agency and resistance in participation

All representations contain the possibilities for alternative ways of thinking and knowing (Marková, 2008) as thinking is only possible through tensions and contradictions (Billig, 1987; Moloney, Hall and Walker, 2005). Rose, Efraim, Gervais, Joffe, Jovchelovitch and Morant (1995) place oppositional themes at the heart of SRT and argue that without this focus on oppositions social psychology could not account for the "diversity, tension and even conflict in modern life" (p.4). They point out that such contradictions are a common feature of common knowledge: "one only has to think about Hitler's Germany where Jews were accused at once of being fierce capitalists and uncompromising communists, hugely successful and totally degenerate" (ibid). The contradictions inherent in social representations relate to Moscovici's original concept of cognitive polyphasia which "highlights the idea that people draw on different types of knowledge to make sense of the world around them" (Provencher, 2011, p. 377). As Jovchelovitch explains with reference to Moscovici's seminal study on forms of common knowledge about psychoanalysis (Moscovici 1976) "contrary to well-established interpretations of cognitive phenomena, the different forms did not appear in different groups, or different contexts; on the contrary, they were capable of coexisting side by side in the same context, social group or individual" (Jovchelovitch, 2007, p. 69). Marková (2003) demonstrates the importance of oppositional themes or themata for participation, social recognition, dialogue and thinking in general, such as we/them, freedom/oppression,

fear/hope and social recognition/ denial of recognition (see also Moscovici and Vignaux, 1994; Moloney, Williams and Blair, 2012).

It is precisely this focus on the oppositions or dialectics of everyday life that makes SRT a particularly useful approach for a political psychology of participation, citizenship and social change (Elcheroth *et al*, 2011). SRT highlights the potentially transformative, on-going, unsettled or incomplete nature of social relations; it depicts a social world that is always a social and political construction. Central to SRT is the ability of social actors to debate their ideas. Marková (2008) has argued that "through 'representing' humans search for meanings and through 'representing' they construct, maintain and transform their reality" (p. 473). Although asymmetries in dialogue and recognition help to maintain dominant representations, they are also the starting point for negotiations because they create debate and contestation; it is "the impossibility of consensus that is the basis of all dialogue" (Marková, 2000, p. 424). The continuous struggle for recognition is at the core of all social relations. It has been argued, for example, that prejudice reduction, that is, greater social recognition, may have adverse effects, reducing resistance to the status quo and discouraging minorities from mobilising towards greater social transformation (Dixon, Levine, Reicher and Durrheim, 2012). Thus, asymmetries in dialogue silence different perspectives and maintain the status quo, but misrecognition may also provoke social change because it functions as a motivation towards greater participation and agency (Howarth, Wagner, Kessi and Sen, 2012).

From a social representations perspective, agency refers to having the power to construct and institute meanings, to claim authority over normative expectations, ideological positions, or 'the truth'. Resistance involves the possibilities to challenge such normative expectations, propose alternative representations (Gillespie, 2008) and provoke transgressive forms of

social relations (Howarth, 2010). For example, research in Norway shows how immigrant youth "reproduce or resist social representations which frame ideological boundaries of ethnic groups when negotiating identities" (Phelps and Nadim, 2010, p. 6). Hence people do not simply 'adjust' to the socio-political order, they also resist (Castro, 2012, p. 2) and so produce alternative positions (Staerklé *et al,* 2011), emancipated or polemical representations. However, possibilities for agency and resistance are opened up and closed down in different contexts and are related to the limits of dialogue in different social relationships and encounters (Jovchelovitch, 2007). One cannot simply think oneself over barriers to participation as "participation in conditions where material and symbolic obstacles prevent the possibility of real social change can be a hollow exercise" (Campbell and Jovchelovitch, 2000, p. 266). Indeed this "legitimises the status quo" (ibid). Hence we need to examine what aspects of the social context or social relationship are likely to support or undermine participation (Campbell and Cornish, 2010). What are the characteristics of safe social spaces where people can engage in dialogue, debate dominant representations and overcome barriers to participation?

It has been found that positive levels of social capital are key in providing the appropriate conditions for resistance in youth development projects (Kessi, 2011). These include relationships of trust and reciprocity (Caughy et al., 2003), common rules, norms and sanctions (Chambers, 2004) amongst community members and alliances with significant individuals or institutions (Campbell, 2003). These conditions take into account the intersecting elements needed for dialogical encounters. They strengthen not only the symbolic positioning of groups but also access to the material and structural resources necessary for participation. This gives an example of how:

What we do is evidently shaped by social norms, by institutional possibilities and institutional constraints. But equally, we can act – act *together* that is – to alter norms, institutions, and even whole social systems. … acting together as group members empowers us to impose our perspectives even against the resistance of others (Subašić, Reynolds, Reicher and Klandermans, 2012, p. 6-7).

Participation is bound up with the social psychological possibilities of agency and resistance, which rest on our social identities, our position in relations of power and inequality and sense of what is achievable and attainable (ibid). This involves the re-appropriation of social representations, collective conscientisation (Freire, 1970) and "a sense of one's agency and efficacy - that action is possible and potentially effective and that the individual can personally take such action, alone or with others" (Haste, 2004, p. 430).

Hence participation is equivalent to having a legitimate voice in the construction of social representations, which depends on patterns of social recognition. As 'ways of world making', social representations have *consequences that may extend beyond the context of their production* to a broader collective. As Elcheroth *et al* (2011) point out: "What counts is *the power to shape mutual expectations within in a collective* in such a manner as to enable or impede coordinated actions directed toward a given purpose" (p. 745, italics in the original). This depends on the dynamics of intergroup relations, the patterns of (mis)recognition and the possibilities for agency and resistance that are established between groups of different power status.

Conclusion: what does SRT bring to Political Psychology?

What SRT brings to political psychology is a much needed 'less top-down view' of the political nature of social relations and social interactions (Haste, 2004, 2012), and expands our understanding of political participation as far more than the communication of views to political elites (Uhlaner, 2001) through voting behaviours, for example (Milbrath, 1965): that is, a sharper focus on everyday culture, local contexts, the dynamic nature of knowledge processes and the on-going politics of social participation. This promotes an analysis of participation as *the power to construct and convey particular representations over others* and so highlights both the political constraints on participation as well as the ways in which such constraints are challenged and overcome. This extends our understanding of what constitutes 'the political' and incorporates the politics of everyday interactions and the symbolic power to develop social meanings that have consequence beyond one's immediate context.

In turn, bringing a Political Psychology to the theory of social representations forces the political construction of knowledge and social relations to come to the fore and demands a sharper analysis of the role of political institutions and discourses on social psychological processes. As "institutional practices and discourses have an impact on the collective and individual identity formation and negotiations" (Scuzzarello, 2012, p. 4), there is a need to develop more detailed analyses of the very political nature of the production, dissemination, negotiation and contestation of social representations, that is to connect the political psychology of state institutions *and* social norms (Andreouli and Howarth, 2012).

A political psychology of participation embedded within the frame of SRT allows a combined focus on the ways in which dominant relations and hegemonic relations are maintained through the ideologies of the past and particular vested interests and, at the same time, allow a

focus on the ways such discourses and social relations are disrupted, unsettled and sometimes transformed. Hence this perspective invites an understanding not only into the ways we understand our social worlds but also in this process how "people make their futures" (Subašić, 2012, p. 12), as Campbell and Jovchelovitch (2000) have also argued:

> "Whenever a community participates and develops a way of knowing about itself and others, it is, by the same token, instituting itself as such, inviting a future for what it does and indeed, actualising the power it holds to participate in shaping a way of life" (Campbell and Jovchelovitch, 2000, p. 267).

As social and political psychologists it is imperative that we examine not only the social construction of knowledge, but also its political construction and contestation, and what possibilities there are to re-construct versions of social relations and so invite different futures and different ways of life.

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