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Familiarising the Unfamiliar: Cognitive Polyphasia, Emotions and the Creation of Social Representations

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Within the Social Representations Theory (SRT) paradigm, social representations are defined technically as practical social knowledge that is produced when groups and individuals encounter the unfamiliar. Social representations therefore function to familiarise the unfamiliar. Theorists also assert that social representations ‘create reality’: they constitute processes through which new meanings and social identities are created and projected into the social world. Both themes are informed by Moscovici’s formulation of a ‘principle of familiarity’. This principle is deemed to be universal and to constitute two interdependent sociopsychological processes: a preference for, and attachment to familiarity that co-exists with and drives resistance to unfamiliarity. A common – and paradoxical - application of this principle to knowledge production states that individuals and communities are motivated to familiarise the unfamiliar because of the *threat the unfamiliar poses* to the safety of what is known. In this paper I argue that Moscovici’s ‘principle of familiarity’ is conceptually limited. By overemphasising an interdependent relationship between ‘attachment to the familiar’ and ‘fear of the unfamiliar’, the principle (a) ignores more plausible motivations driving the creation of social representations and (b) undermines the constructivist character of the phenomena.

I discuss anthropological evidence on African communities that are ‘open to the unfamiliar’. In contrast to Moscovici’s universal ‘principle of familiarity’ these communities are motivated to familiarise the unfamiliar because of the *risks and threats inherent in the familiar* and the *power attributed to the unfamiliar*. Drawing on Moscovici’s reflections on cognitive polyphasia and broader SRT discussions about social representations as cognitive-emotional processes, I consider conceptual challenges this counter-evidence poses to social representations theory in its broader project as a universal theory of social knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

“Why do we create social representations? Is it to solve a problem? To achieve what the economy of thought is setting out to achieve? Or as Bartlett assumed, because we try hard to get a meaning? I myself have suggested a more concrete and observable reason, namely that *we create representations in order to make familiar what is strange, disturbing, uncanny*. This “principle of familiarity” underpins a large part of psychology and sociology. On the basis of numerous observations, *it has become clear that individuals and communities resist the intrusion of strangeness.*” (Moscovici, 2001, p.20, emphasis added)

Within the Social Representations Theory (SRT) paradigm, social representations are defined in two key, technical, ways. First, social representations constitute particular kinds of (practical) social knowledge that emerge when groups and individuals encounter the unfamiliar. Secondly, SRT theorists assert that social representations are not merely interpretations or reflections of social reality, but they also ‘create reality’ (Gervais, 1997, p.47). The constructivist character of social representations is based on the familiarisation thesis. Moscovici (1984) asserts that “*the purpose of all representations is to make something unfamiliar, or unfamiliarity itself, familiar*” (pp.23-24, italics added). This purpose, he argues, hinges on a universal ‘principle of familiarity’ that has two interdependent sociopsychological dimensions: an attachment to familiarity that co-exists with and drives resistance to unfamiliarity. Moscovici asserts that individuals are

fundamentally motivated to overcome the resistance they experience when faced with the unfamiliar: “the act of re-presentation is a means of transferring what disturbs us, what threatens our universe, from the outside to the inside, from far off to near by” (1984, p.26).

This conceptual position is endorsed, to varying degrees, in other authoritative accounts of the theory (e.g. Jovchelovitch, 2001, 2002; Wagner et al., 1999a, 1999b). Yet, empirical evidence within the field does not adequately explain why individuals and communities would seek to tame alien threats and how, by extension, social representations are created from this specific familiar-unfamiliar encounter.

In this paper, I will argue that Moscovici’s formulation of the ‘principle of familiarity’ does not provide a ‘concrete and observable’ reason to why we create social representations; furthermore it undermines the constructivist goal of SRT. I begin by presenting empirical evidence from SRT studies that undermine the principle as a motivational basis for the creation of social representations. I then offer evidence from anthropological work on African communities that are ‘open to the unfamiliar’ (Goody, 1975, 1987; Last, 1992; Rekdal, 1999, Mudimbe & Appiah, 1993): this openness is a culturally driven “preferred persistent tendency” (Bartlett, 1932). Some categories of “strange, disturbing, uncanny” (Moscovici, 2001, p.20) unfamiliar phenomena do not pose a threat; they are imbued with transformative power and are proactively sought as a necessary resource for innovative knowledge production. The incorporation of the unfamiliar into familiar ways of being in these communities is underpinned by the recognition of the risks and threats inherent in the familiar and the motivation to address these risks and threats. I discuss the implications of this counter-evidence for Moscovici’s principle of familiarity. I argue that Moscovici’s emphasis on tension as a driver of social representations (Moscovici, 1984), his reflections on cognitive polyphasia (1961/1976; 1987, 1998, 2001) and broader SRT discussions about social representations as cognitive-emotional processes (Kalampalikis & Haas, 2008; Markova & Wilkie, 1987) offer important conceptual tools to SRT in its broader project as a universal theory of social knowledge.

I. MOSCOVICI AND ‘THE PRINCIPLE OF FAMILIARITY’: FEAR OF THE UNFAMILIAR, TAMING THE UNFAMILIAR

Moscovici’s conception of the ‘principle of familiarity’ underscores two interdependent dimensions. First, communities and individuals exhibit great attachment to, and preference for, what is familiar. He points to the ‘unbearable dread’ “of losing customary landmarks, of losing touch with what provides a sense of continuity, of mutual understanding...” (1984, p.26). In making sense of the value of the familiar, Moscovici (1984, p.27) aligns himself, to Bartlett’s thesis on conservation:

“...whenever material visually presented purports to be representative of some common object, but contains certain features which are unfamiliar in the community to which the material is introduced, these features invariably suffer transformation in the direction of the familiar’ (Bartlett, 1961, p.178).”

Moscovici (1984) proposes two fundamental mechanisms that mediate the creation of social representations: anchoring and objectification. Both work to settle “the basic tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar...in favour of the former” (p.27). Anchoring is a mechanism that “strives to *anchor* strange ideas, to reduce them to ordinary categories and images, to set them in a familiar context” (p.29, emphasis in original). Anchoring constitutes classifying and naming something new or strange in terms of existing stocks of knowledge. Objectification is the process through which unfamiliar phenomena, or abstract ideas, are condensed into what Moscovici (1984) refers to as a ‘figurative nucleus’ – “a complex of images that visibly reproduces a complex of ideas” (p.38). Moscovici notes of the conservation functions of anchoring and objectification:

“the images and ideas by means of which we grasp the unusual only bring us back to what we already knew and had long been familiar with and which, therefore, gives a reassuring impression of *déjà vu* and *deja connu*.” (1984, p.27).

Both processes, as described here and elsewhere in Moscovici's broader thesis, are not constructivist. As Markova (1996) observes, they are cognitive globalising mechanisms because they convert unfamiliar or complex events, objects or ideas into conventional categories.

Second, Moscovici (2001) claims that "individuals and communities resist the intrusion of strangeness" (p.20). Resistance is conceptualised broadly in terms of tension, and narrowly in terms of fear. Moscovici argues that "the unfamiliar attracts and intrigues individuals and communities, while at the same time, it alarms them" (1984, p.24). In this formulation, the encounter with the unfamiliar is underpinned by tension; a simultaneous process of being drawn to and recoiling from the strange. Markova (2003a), in a discussion and expansion of Moscovici's thesis on tension observes that "Moscovici has always placed emphasis on tension as a force of change" (p.152). Tension, in Moscovici's thesis, binds and mediates a triadic relationship between Ego (self), Alter (other/s) and Object (being represented) (Markova, 2003a). "With tension" Markova notes, "we have a dialogical triad, the dynamic unit of the theory of social knowledge" (p.153).

Alongside the 'tension hypothesis', Moscovici (1984) proposes a narrower 'fear hypothesis'. He asserts that things which are "unclassified and unnamed are alien, non-existent and at the same time threatening" (p.30) and also that "the fear of what is strange (and of strangers) is deep-rooted" (p.24). Fear serves two functions in Moscovici's thesis. First, a distancing function: "when other-ness is thrust upon us in the form of something 'not quite' as it should be, we instinctively reject it, because it threatens the established order" (p.26). This function is in keeping with the argument that 'a sense of continuity, of mutual understanding' is preferable to loss of 'customary landmarks'. Second, and paradoxically, fear imposes a taming motivation: "the act of re-presentation is a means of transferring what disturbs us, what threatens our universe, from the outside to the inside, from far off to nearby" (p.26). It is unclear in Moscovici's thesis whether *distancing* and *taming* occur simultaneously or sequentially in single encounters with the unfamiliar or whether each occurs under distinct conditions. However, there is a consistent view that the motivation to tame an alien threat drives the creation of social representations.

While the tension and fear hypotheses co-exist within the SRT field, the fear hypothesis – and in particular the *taming* argument - dominates conceptual discussion and empirical work (e.g.

Jovchelovitch, 2001; Joffe & Haarhoff, 2002; Wagner et al., 1999a). Yet, evidence gathered to date within the field, including Moscovici's own seminal work, undermines the central claim that fear motivates the taming of alien threats. The opposite process of distancing, othering, or ostracism is more commonly implicated (Jodelet, 1991; Joffe, 1993, 1996; Kalampalikis & Haas, 2008; Morant, 1995; Moscovici, 1984; Rose, 2000). This process, crucially, does not project new meanings and identities into the social world. It *re-familiarises the familiar*, or re-familiarises the “*non-familiar that guarantees, orchestrates or institutes a difference*” (Kalampalikis & Haas, 2008, p.456, emphasis in original), thereby reinforcing established, albeit heterogeneous, meanings, identities and relationships within a given community.

II. SRT STUDIES AND ‘THE PRINCIPLE OF FAMILIARITY’: FEAR OF THE UNFAMILIAR, REFAMILIARISING THE FAMILIAR

Gervais and colleagues (1999), reading Lagache's (1961/1976) introduction to Moscovici's *La Psychanalyse: Son image et son public*, draw attention to ‘theoretical absences’ in this work, which led to unnecessary overemphasis on fear as a motivation underpinning objectification of psychoanalytic concepts. In the text Moscovici argued that central elements of psychoanalytic theory, such as sexuality and libido, which were ‘heavily charged with imagery’, remained ‘abstract’ within French societal thought and practice. He argued that these elements broke cultural taboo in 1950s French society and were thus excluded from the collective objectification of psychoanalysis, as a (collective) self-protective strategy (Moscovici, 1984).

Gervais and colleagues note that Moscovici gave undue importance to the concept of libido, rather than the notion of “defensive conflict” which was more central to Freud's oeuvre¹. They suggest that the non-objectification of libido within French society was due simply to the fact that it was a peripheral notion within psychoanalytic theory and thus less widely accessed. Gervais and colleagues suggest that lack of knowledge rather than fear was implicated in the selective objectification of psychoanalysis: fear was unnecessarily imputed into the representational process due to Moscovici's “partial construction of the object” of research.

¹ See also Billig (2008) on the same point.

An interesting subtext to this discussion of theoretical absence - and Gervais and colleagues do not address this - is that Moscovici's (1984) interpretation of his data undermines the centrality of the principle of familiarity to the creation of social representations. First, the elements which were already familiar and in constant use were represented. This suggested that unfamiliar elements – those least known and least employed – were not represented. But more crucially, by Moscovici's own admission, unfamiliar elements that posed a threat – the objects of 'taboo' – were not incorporated into the figurative nucleus of psychoanalysis through the expected *taming* process. Thus, on the one hand, the principle of familiarity was upheld in this instance: attachment to the familiar appeared to buttress resistance to the unfamiliar. But on the other hand, this specific interdependent relationship did not facilitate the creation of social representations. The 'strange, disturbing, uncanny' elements of psychoanalysis were neither familiarised nor constituted the basis for projecting new meanings and identities into the social world.

A second line of critique has come from Jahoda (1988) who focuses on Moscovici's conceptualisation of the anchoring of psychoanalysis. Moscovici (1984) asserted that in 1950s France, psychoanalysis - a "medical treatment without medicine" (p.26) - seemed strange and paradoxical. However, people compared elements of the psychoanalytic process such as free association to the process and rules of Catholic confession. Moscovici (1984) argued that once the method of free association had been detached from its psychoanalytic theoretical origins and transposed to the religious context of "priests and penitents, of father confessors and contrite sinners", it ceased to be "offensive and paradoxical" and assumed an ordinary, normal character (p.26). This explanation, largely upheld by SRT theorists, is questionable in Jahoda's view. Jahoda (1988) observes that in the original source of data, "it is the people who are *best informed* about psychoanalysis who most frequently make the religious comparison" (p.203, emphasis in original). This trend was not culturally specific to France but common among "sophisticated writers on psychoanalysis" in Europe (p.203). Crucially, those least informed on psychoanalysis formed no opinions of psychoanalysis: *the strange remained strange*, essentially, across a section of Moscovici's participants. Gervais and colleagues (1999) outline empirical absences across socio-economic and educational status and age to buttress this point:

“whereas most French people shared a common understanding of psychoanalysis, 51% of working class respondents declared themselves totally ignorant of psychoanalysis and the remaining 49% of this group appeared to hold very ill-structured and content-poor representations... Across the entire sample, the subjects who were less knowledgeable about psychoanalysis were generally older, less educated, poorer and more conservative, for instance, than those who shared more elaborate notions of psychoanalysis.”

Jahoda (1988) observes that if the social representation process were a “means of making something alien and disturbing familiar and comfortable”, then “one would expect people who know little about psychoanalysis to be most likely to arrive at such a re-presentation” of psychoanalysis as a new mode of Catholic confession (p.203). Jahoda argues that as this did not occur, “the claim that there is a motivational basis for the transformation of strange notions into social representations has not been substantiated” and “the necessary conditions for social representations to emerge” require systematic reconceptualisation and analysis (p.201). He offers other motivations towards the unfamiliar such as “curiosity motivation and the attraction of novelty” (p.201) as more worthy empirical subjects.

Empirical data gathered by other SRT theorists on encounters with alien threats support Jahoda’s call for rigorous analysis (Jodelet, 1991; Joffe, 1993, 1996; Morant, 1995; Kalampalikis & Haas, 2008; Rose, 2000). Rose notes of her study on the representations of madness in the British media, that “familiarisation, social or psychological, does not structure the representational field of madness” (p.255). Rather:

representations of mental ill-health, be they in the media or as everyday conversation, *maintain madness in an unfamiliar position*. [...] madness is either not assimilated at all and stands excluded, or is assimilated to other objects that are never quite made familiar, such as people with learning disabilities, people with physical disabilities, people or things who take part in the monstrous. (p.255, emphasis in original)

For Rose, madness ought to be regarded as a ‘special case’ with respect to Moscovici’s familiarisation thesis, because the contents of representations of madness “emphasize danger, menace and threat”, the structure of representations are unstable, and the meanings that ensue are threatening, characterised as they are by “chaos and transgression”.

The distancing effect of fear also emerges in Jodelet’s (1991) classic study of rural French representations of madness, Morant’s (1995) study of representations of mental illness among British and French mental health professionals, and Joffe’s (1993, 1996) cross-cultural study of representations of HIV/AIDS in Britain and South Africa. In all cases, the social object under study – madness, mental illness, HIV/AIDS - constituted “strange, disturbing, uncanny” phenomena that were resisted and did not evoke motivations enforcing their transformation into social representations. These studies demonstrated that in the familiar everyday world, there are categories of unfamiliar objects and subjects that are actively kept unfamiliar. These are *familiar alien threats*, in the sense that they are constitutive of the familiar social world but are, as Rose (2000) observes, “never quite made familiar” as “people or things who take part in the monstrous” (p.255). Kalampalakis and Haas (2008, p.455) have described this phenomenon as a ‘threatening alterity’. They argue that a threatening alterity is not always compatible with ““positive” familiarisation”. Rather it is compatible with ‘stigmatic thinking’ that simultaneously introduces strangeness and enforces “symbolic protection and defence” against the strange. They argue, following Moscovici’s (2002) distinction between stigmatic thinking and symbolic thinking, that while symbolic thinking familiarises the unfamiliar through taming processes, stigmatic thinking familiarises “*the uncommon, the non familiar, the strange, the not me, that guarantees, orchestrates or institutes a difference*” (Kalampalakis & Haas, 2008, p. 456 emphasis in original). The process is one of distancing or ostracism. It is important to note that the taming and distancing processes undermine the principle of familiarity and do not offer insights into the constructivist nature of social representations. Morant’s (1995) interpretation of her study findings offer preliminary insights to conceptualise a third approach to familiarising a threatening alterity that involves a constructivist process. Morant (1995, p.10), like others (Joffe, 1996; Rose, 2000), suggests that “unfamiliarity co-exists with familiarity at the heart of the representation” of mental illness. However, she emphasises the importance of distinguishing between two types of unfamiliar objects: unfamiliarity derived from a marginalised social position which is particularly

threatening and fearful and unfamiliarity derived from novelty. The implicit assumption in Morant's (1995) work is that unfamiliarity derived from the novel may not contain threatening alterity, and that this category may be instrumental in constructivist social representations. However, the following anthropological case studies suggest that transformational knowledge production may arise from proactive encounters with unfamiliar objects that are novel, as well as objects that incorporate threatening alterity. The underlying processes present the possibility that Moscovici's principle of familiarity may be upheld, but is more likely to be constituted of a different set of socio-psychological interdependent processes between familiarity, unfamiliarity and the location of either category within self and/or the other.

III. ANTHROPOLOGICAL CASE STUDIES AND 'THE PRINCIPLE OF UNFAMILIARITY': THE THREAT OF THE FAMILIAR, OPENESS TO THE UNFAMILIAR , FAMILIARISING THE (UN)FAMILIAR

Theoretical debates have unfolded within anthropology about the extent to which societies are 'closed', 'adversarial', 'accommodative' or 'open' to the unfamiliar (Appiah, 1992; Curtin, 1972; Fardon, 1990; Horton, 1993; Mudimbe & Appiah, 1993; Shack & Skinner, 1979). In these discussions, 'the unfamiliar' towards which cultures are either closed or open constitutes cultural strangers, the natural environment and the supernatural. Closed cultures are deemed resistant to change, while open cultures adapt foreign ways of thinking, seeing and doing into existing structures, producing pluralistic (or syncretic) transformations. The following case studies are drawn from this body of work.

"The Healing Power of the Culturally Distant" (Rekdal, 1999)

Rekdal's (1999) anthropological work on medical pluralism among the Iraqw of Tanzania, reveals that proactive acceptance of 'alien' biomedical health services by Iraqw society was facilitated by Iraqw socio-cultural emphasis on the healing power of the culturally distant; an attribution which implied Iraqw "*openness to the unfamiliar, the alien, the unknown*" (p.458, emphasis mine).

Rekdal provides an account of inter-ethnic relations between the Iraqw and the neighbouring Maanda Uwa ethnic group. On the one hand, the Maanda Uwa are held in disdain by the Iraqw because of their ‘unclean’ customs; on the other hand, the Maanda Uwa are among the most widely respected and widely used healers, because the Maanda Uwa provided the ‘apical ancestor’ of the clan possessing the greatest ritual expertise and power among the Iraqw. Iraqw stereotypes of the Maanda Uwa therefore contain both “contempt and respect” (p.469). Rekdal argues that these divergent emotional attitudes are not contradictory but mutually influential. Within anthropological discussions, two sets of ideas emphasise “ambiguity associated with the culturally distant” (p.469). The first, emphasises ethnocentrism and suggests that “the greater the extent of cultural difference, the greater is the amount of antagonism or scorn expressed” by the observer of alien cultures deemed “deviant from the familiar” (George, 1958, in Rekdal, 1999, p.469). The second, emphasises polycentrism and suggests a strong correlation between geographical distance and supernatural power: “places and people that are increasingly different” may be regarded as increasingly supernatural, mythical, and powerful, the more distant they are from the heartland” (Helms, 1988, in Rekdal, 1999, p.470). Thus, “*the power inherent in the ambiguity of the culturally distant*” (p.470, emphasis mine) drives the transformation of Iraqw healing and ritual expertise by simultaneously generating “ethnic contrast, conflict, and contempt” and facilitating ‘cross-ethnic borrowing’.

Crucially, Rekdal’s work suggests that emphasis on the “power inherent in the ambiguity of the culturally distant” operated hand-in-glove with reflexive awareness of weaknesses within Iraqw socio-cultural structures and relationships. At the level of specific groups, there was a tendency for local healers to challenge local political authority in their quest to expand professional expertise. This tendency was rooted in the flexibility and adaptability of Iraqw healers (like a vast number of traditional healers across the African region²) towards alien forms of healing – a process underpinned by their historical ability and power to ‘*invent tradition*’ in order to move with changing times, economies and socio-cultural demands. Respect and dissent framed the relationships between healers and political authorities. In broader society, everyday daily social relations and practices among the Iraqw were underpinned by a fundamental emotional paradox of intense loyalty and mistrust. These emotional tensions and conflicted

² See for instance S. Feerman & J. M. Janzen (Eds.) (1992) and J. DeJong (1991).

alliances were based on a reflexive awareness that “the intimacy so highly valued between neighbours renders them vulnerable to each other” (p.468). These internal dynamics did not only highlight the complexities of intra-cultural relationships and practices, but also drew attention to the ways ever-present wariness or scepticism about these relationships and practices framed the very nature of cultural openness in Iraqw society³.

It is within this context, Rekdal argues, that the acceptance of biomedical systems by Iraqw society had to be understood: “biomedicine as a way of understanding and approaching illness was certainly new to the Iraqw; *what was not new was the incorporation of an alien way of looking at and acting on illness*” (p.472, emphasis mine). Rekdal speculates that in other African societies, people may accept biomedicine precisely because they “believe in and “cling to” their “native medicine”, with its emphasis on the healing power of the culturally distant” (p.473). Similar evidence on the allure of the foreign healer (even from enemy territory) is discussed in ethnographic work in Nigeria (Last, 1992), Niger (Masquelier, 1994), Tangayika (Feierman, 1986), Zambia (Yamba, 1997) and among the Massai (Waller, 1995).

“Innovation Is Authorized by Outside Agencies” (Goody, 1975, 1987)

Goody’s (1975, 1987) discussion of knowledge acquisition among the LoDagaa of Northern Ghana offers insights into the role of threatening alterity in the production of transformational social knowledge. LoDagaa epistemology is shaped by the interdependency between visible (known, familiar) and invisible (unknown, unfamiliar) worlds (Hawkins, 2003). Three intersecting modes of knowledge and knowledge production are present in this society: (1) basic knowledge drawn from everyday relations and activities; (2) traditional knowledge drawn from traditional beliefs and myths; and (3) transformational knowledge drawn from the invisible world of supernatural “powers, spiritual forces, agencies” (Goody, 1975, p.157). Each system of knowledge is tied to distinct social groups: everyday knowledge is the domain of all; traditional

³ See also Adams and Dzokoto (2003) for similar observations on the paradoxes of relational interdependence in some Ghanaian societies. A popular Akan that warns of the risk inherent in intimate relationships goes: ‘*Aboa bi reka wo a, öfiri wo ntoma mu*’ (literal translation - ‘if an animal is biting, it is from inside your cloth’; meaning – ‘A person close to you is the most likely to harm you’) (Appiah et al., 2001, p.186). Similar observations are made in other African contexts about the ‘dark side of kinship’ (c.f. Ciekawy & Geschiere, 1998; ter Haar, 2007). In the western context, the paradoxes of relational interdependence have been reported in a body of literature on ‘the dark side’ of interpersonal communication and relationships (Olsen et al., 2012; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007).

knowledge is the domain of traditional leaders and traditional history reciters; and transformational knowledge is the domain of priests, healers and other legitimate social agents with access to the invisible world.

Goody describes the invisible world of the LoDagaa in similar ways to Moscovici's (1987) 'familiar unfamiliar'. While the bush, the spirits, the agents of the bush and spirits, and God constitute part of the invisible world that co-exists with the visible (Hawkins, 2003), this 'familiar unfamiliar' world evokes intense fear. Furthermore, while the LoDagaa conceptualise the all powerful high God as creator of both man and supernatural agencies, God, according to traditional knowledge, is seen as both 'active' and 'otiose'. However, within LoDagaa society, "innovation is authorized by outside agencies" (Goody, 1975, p.165) and religious faith decrees that "in the ambiguity of the creator God lies the possibility of change" (Goody, 1975, p.105). Outside agencies are innovators *precisely because* of their difference and their separateness from what is known: "they are distinct from human society; they are importers of new messages, new techniques of the outside world." (1975, p.95). It is through them that new deities emerge, healers gain their mysterious powers, and cults and shrines proliferate. God is powerful precisely because of the ambiguity and unpredictable nature of his power. All of these combine to change the everyday circumstances of LoDagaa people and the features of their culture, including everyday knowledge. Like Iraqw society, the socio-cultural draw to the supernatural is facilitated by recognition of weaknesses within socio-cultural systems. Scepticism and disappointment about the weaknesses of existing healing systems co-exist with and deepen hope for new effective therapies. These mixed emotions drive "the search for new shrines, new curing agencies." (Goody, 1987, p.156). Goody argues that the "process of religious creation is rendered almost essential" (1987, p.131) by the empirical failures of cults and shrines, and the search for new cults and cures is rooted in an insistence on "*an element of 'distance' of difference*" (1975, p.95, emphasis mine) from familiar systems.

Goody's (1975) emphasis on "*an element of 'distance' of difference*" in the creation of practical (religious) knowledge among the LoDagaa emerges in other African ethnographic work on religious pluralism - among the Akan in Ghana (Parish, 2003); the Lele of Congo (Douglas, 1963) - and in broader continental (e.g Horton, 1993, Mudimbe & Appiah, 1993) discussions on religious pluralism. It also features in anthropological discussions of ritual in

other, non-African, cultural contexts which often incorporate change or the new in practices aimed at holding customs and cultures together (Handelman & Lindquist, 2005).

These case studies provide a number of pertinent insights:

(1) Individuals and communities do not always prefer the familiar or experience ‘unbearable dread’ “of losing customary landmarks” (Moscovici, 1984, p.26). The societies described here are attached to their cultural values, but do not reify all their values. Indeed, non-reification of cultural values is a core cultural value particularly among the select group of community members who are charged with innovation (Rekdal, 1999). There is a concomitant shared recognition of the fallibility of existing relations, society, culture and its belief systems; for example the untrustworthy relative or neighbour (Rekdal, 1999), the unscrupulous healer (Last, 1992) or religious belief itself (Goody, 1975, 1987).

(2) Individuals and communities are not always resistant to the unfamiliar. Crucially, this lack of resistance applies both to the unfamiliar that is novel and the unfamiliar that is feared. The case studies suggest that at an ontological level, unfamiliarity, including the kind that is intensely feared - such as the wild or shrines - may be a source of innovation and knowledge production for some cultures (Goody, 1975, 1987). At a practical level, some categories of unfamiliar strangers, unfamiliar customs and practices are highly favoured due to their perceived spiritual power. At both levels, communities appear to seek unfamiliar phenomena that are markedly different from what is known and lived. This finding challenges Moscovici’s overemphasis on fear of the unfamiliar, and at the same time provides some insight into why individuals and communities would seek to familiarise ‘strange, disturbing, uncanny’ phenomena that may be categorised as threatening alterity.

(3) The interdependent relationship between (collective) self-critique and attraction to the novel appear to drive the familiarisation of alien threats. A reflexive awareness exists of the co-existence of familiarity and unfamiliarity within self (e.g. the potentially destructive intimate partner), as well as within the unfamiliar or familiar other (e.g. the ambiguous power of God). This reflexive awareness is mediated by a range of mixed, often opposing, emotions directed at both self and the other: contempt versus respect, fear versus desire, disappointment versus hope. Constructivist knowledge production therefore involves the active reconstruction of (collective)

self and social objects by bringing together the deficient aspects of self and the transformational or powerful aspects of the unfamiliar other.

(4) Different systems of knowledge (common sense, tradition, medicine, religion), complex identities (relative, neighbour, healer, the healthy and the ill, traditional authorities) and cognitive-emotional processes (reflection mediated by social and embodied emotions) play key roles in the active construction of new knowledge.

Crucially, these four interrelated elements underpin knowledge production in other cultures (cf. Handelman & Lindquist, 2005; Pigg, 1996; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007; Wetherell, 2012) – both non-western and western – and therefore offer more universal socio-psychological mediators for the principle of familiarity and for constructivist social representation processes.

IV. FAMILIARISING THE UNFAMILIAR: COGNITIVE POLYPHASIA, EMOTIONS AND CREATION OF SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

The SRT and anthropological case studies presented here suggest that to understand the motivations driving familiarisation of the (threatening) unfamiliar, the formulation of the interdependent processes underpinning the ‘principle of familiarity’ needs to be revised. The move towards the unfamiliar is not driven by resistance to, or fear of, the “intrusion of strangeness” (Moscovici, 2001). It is more likely to be driven by emotional tension: a simultaneous process of being attracted to and alarmed by the strange (Moscovici, 1984, p.24). This tension may be driven by recognition or experience of the weaknesses, risks or threats inherent in self, intimate relationships, the immediate society and lived culture. Thus, the principle is likely to hinge on an interdependent relationship characterised by ‘discomfort with the self-destructive aspects of self’ and ‘attraction to the self-enhancing aspects of the unfamiliar’. This interdependent process draws attention to intra-cultural and inter-group cognitive-emotional tensions, and the simultaneous use of complex knowledge systems tied to distinct social groups, as a precondition for the creation of new social knowledge. These processes underscore the utility of Moscovici’s tension thesis and hypothesis of cognitive polyphasia (Moscovici, 1987, 1988, 1998, 2001, 2008). They also lend credence to the call by Markova and Wilkie (1987) to reconceptualise social representations as cognitive-emotional

processes. Moscovici's hypothesis of cognitive polyphasia offers a unifying framework to develop these interconnected sets of ideas.

Moscovici (2008) defines cognitive polyphasia as a “dynamic co-existence – interference or specialisation - of the distinct modalities of knowledge, corresponding to definite relations between man and his environment” (p.190). Developed within the context of his study on social representations of psychoanalysis in 1950s France, the hypothesis illuminated the way in which different social groups and individuals drew on complex modalities of knowledge – for example political ideology, religion, common sense, medical science – to make sense of psychoanalysis.

Cognitive polyphasia offers important insights into the dynamic nature of social communication, thinking, reflection and feeling, when groups and individuals are faced with the unfamiliar. As the study of psychoanalysis demonstrated, a central aspect of cognitive polyphasia, in the French communities, was public and private tension (Moscovici, 2008). Moscovici observed that ‘cultural fights’ and ‘battles of ideas’ engendered by media propaganda against psychoanalysis set up “intellectual polemics and opposition between different modes of thinking” (p.229), which co-existed between and within social groups, as well as in individual minds. He asserted that when knowledge is shared or diffused during these ‘cultural struggles’ there is a “conflict between new and old, between esoteric and exoteric ideas, which each party wants to win by strategies of persuasion” (p.261). A secondary aspect of cognitive polyphasia was the role of emotions. Moscovici (2000) maintained, drawing from the theoretical ideas of Berkeley that:

“the communicating of ideas marked by words is not the chief and only end of language, as is commonly supposed. There are other ends, as the raising of some passion, the exciting to, or deterring from an action, the putting in mind in some particular disposition.”(p.261).

In Moscovici's view, therefore, persuasive communicative strategies, particularly within the context of the dissemination of new information, were put forward, contested and negotiated *emotionally*. In his original discussion of the production of knowledge on psychoanalysis, Moscovici (2008, pp. 190-193) alluded to the role of individual and shared emotions in cognitive

polyphasia when he contrasted the transformational power of reflection with the conservatism of fixed dispositions ('cognitive style', 'attribution of a type of egocentric or paranoiac knowledge to the group') in the production of new knowledge. Elsewhere, he has made glancing reference to the embodied dimensions of communication (Moscovici, 2000). Together these bring his ideas closer in line with arguments within SRT that social representations should be conceptualised as cognitive-emotional processes (Markova & Wilkie, 1987; Kalampalikis & Haas, 2008).

While Moscovici has always insisted that cognitive polyphasia is a hypothesis, he has offered strategies for conceptual and methodological development. He suggests that a focus on cognitive polyphasia affords the conceptual tools for examining (1) the correspondence between social situations and modalities of knowledge that are developed to make sense of social situations; and (2) how these modalities of knowledge are transformed - whether in the direction of equilibrium or of evolution - in terms of the relationships that are established between them and their adaptation in the social world (Moscovici, 2008, pp.190-191). From a methodological standpoint Moscovici (2000) suggests that a focus on norms, context and goals will facilitate more systematic examination and interpretation of the ways groups and individuals draw eclectically and, sometimes, contrarily, on heterogenous socio-cultural knowledge. Norms facilitate understanding of the way culture constructs the parameters for everyday life, including the legitimation of rationality and irrationality (Moscovici, 2000). Context refers to the source and nature of the unfamiliar, which set in motion the processes of anchoring and objectification: "when studying a representation, we should always try to discover the unfamiliar feature which motivated it and which it has absorbed" (Moscovici, 1984, p.28). Finally, Moscovici (2000) asserts that individual and social goals shape the use of knowledge: "knowing takes on a different shape according to the specific aim it strives to achieve" (p.246). Within this framework, two key considerations must shape the application of cognitive polyphasia to future work on the principle of familiarity. First, tension must be placed at the fore and the focus on the role of emotions must move beyond fear. Second, research has to incorporate self-knowledge or the individual level of analysis into the examination of social representations processes.

The Role of Emotions in the Social Representations Process

The role of emotions in the social representational process has received limited conceptual development within the field. Anchoring and objectification have acknowledged theoretical roots in Bartlett's (1932) notions of conventionalisation and reconstructive imagination, respectively (Moscovici, 1988, 2001). In Bartlett's (1932) original formulation, both transcend cognition: they are explicitly embedded in the "setting of interest, excitement and emotion" which shape societal and individual biases to the unfamiliar emerging from outside and within socio-cultural boundaries (p. 255). Moscovici (1987, 1988, 2000, 2008) has made frequent references to the emotional character of social representations. Theorists have highlighted the role of emotions in discourse, inter-group attitudes, identity construction and social thought (Duveen, 2001; Jodelet, 1991; Joffe, 1993,1995,1999; Kalampalikis & Haas, 2008; Markova & Wilkie, 1987). Some theorists have argued that the exclusion of emotions from SRT undermines full understanding of knowledge production and use (Flick, 1998; Markova & Wilkie, 1987). Markova and Wilkie (1987) have proposed that social representations should be conceptualised as cognitive-emotional processes. These ideas remain to be rigorously developed. I suggest two starting lines of development.

First, it is important that SRT facilitates examination of the broad range of emotions that mediate everyday social life, communication and relations. Curiosity motivation and the attraction to novelty or the unfamiliar (Jahoda, 1988; Rekdal, 1999), sympathy (Duveen, 2008), hospitality (Kalampalikis & Haas, 2008), interest and excitement (Moscovici, 2000) and hope (Goody, 1987) have appeared as legitimate mediators of social knowledge production. Fear, as an emotional category, requires more nuanced socio-psychological study within SRT. Its conservative functions have been overemphasised while its transformational functions, particularly within the context of emotional tension, have received minimal systematic attention.

Second, the role of tension in the creation of social representations requires greater conceptual attention, since the motivations mediating familiarising process are underpinned by cognitive (knowing, not knowing, not wanting to know) and emotional (mixed feelings) tensions. A central argument in Mosocovici's body of work is the role of tension as a force of change (Markova, 2003a). Tension is a function of 'mutually experienced strangeness' between self and

the other (Markova, 2003b, p.257), and emerges “from different activities of different forces” (Markova, 2003a, p.151). Thus, it has unpredictable socio-psychological outcomes:

“Tension...is not a yes-no concept. There could be a low tension in a system that hardly produces any effect. In contrast, there could be a high tension leading to conflict and revolution. Sometimes tension manifests itself only internally as an internal polemic without any apparent external effect at the time, but preparing its effect for the future” (p.156).

In some instances, communities and individuals seek to ‘re-establish stability’ when confronted with tension and conflict within their social worlds. But in other instances, tension constitutes an active ‘force for change’ (Markova, 2003). The proposal by Markova and Wilkie (1987) that social representations should be conceptualised as cognitive-emotional processes provide an important starting point to examine the structure and functions of tension.

Socio-cultural theories on emotion posit that cognition and emotion are “mutually constitutive” (Jagger, 1989, p.157). As Crossley (1998) asserts: “we do not just account for or organize emotions, we account for and organize things emotionally” (p.21). Kalamalikis and Haas (2008), citing Maurice Halbwachs (1938, p.367), observe that “social thought may simply be just a mixture that operates by necessity between two kinds of logic, affective and objective, and this is why it is essentially illogical” (p.435). Groups and individuals across diverse cultures do not only live with, accept and negotiate emotional tensions (mixed emotions, mixed feelings), but they also draw actively on emotional tensions and ambiguities in the rational organisation of their everyday life. Socio-cultural theories of emotions suggest three ways in which emotions can be subsumed within the study of social representations: (1) Emotions constitute a knowledge modality, with all the explanatory and functional power of knowledge and beliefs (Crossley, 1998; Hareli & Parkinson, 2008; Peters et al., 2004); (2) emotions are integral to thought and reflection (Crossley, 1998; Jagger, 1989); and (3) emotions are central to practice or action (Hareli & Parkinson, 2008; Wetherell, 2012). To develop a systematic examination of the role of tension and its cognitive-emotional dynamics in the creation of social representations, a case can be made for cognitive-emotional polyphasia as a conceptual framework. At the first level, this

would constitute an expansion of Moscovici's hypothesis of cognitive polyphasia to include emotions as a valid system of knowledge that co-exists with other systems of knowledge (culture, religion, science). Social emotions such as hope, love and fear mediate social relationships, social behaviour and the production of social knowledge (Hareli & Parkinson, 2008). At the second level, emotions would play a mediating role in the development, expression and transformation of the cognitive dynamics of social thought, reflection, communication and action. For example, the structure, functions and evolution of religious knowledge in the everyday lives of a social group makes sense - to both insiders and outsiders - when prescribed embodied emotions such as faith, hope and love are present.

The Role of Self Knowledge in the Social Representations Process

There is recognition within the SRT field that social representations take different forms at different levels of analysis. Moscovici (1988, p.288) observes that

There is a world of difference between representations envisaged at the person-to-person level and at the level of the relations between individuals and group, or at the level of a society's common consciousness. At each level, representations have a completely different meaning. The phenomena are related but different.

Doise has proposed organising principles for anchoring which occur at the levels of the psychological, psycho-sociological and sociological and are shaped by social positioning and membership (Spini & Doise, 1998). Similarly, Duveen's work on the relationship between social representations and social identities incorporates explicit attention to the roles of social groups and individuals (Duveen, 2001; 2008; Duveen & Lloyd, 1990). Purkhardt (1993) proposes an 'organism-environment-cultural system' that constitutes 'a social being that is part of a physical and cultural context', in interaction with other social beings, the physical environment and the culture that 'exists in the emerging relationship between people and their environment'. Social reality within this system "assimilates the physical with the social and does not dissociate human beings from their environment" (p.72)

Despite these conceptual assertions, empirical SRT work has focused largely on group and structural level analyses. Individual (subjective) and inter-individual (inter-subjective) levels of analysis have received very limited empirical attention. With rare exceptions (e.g. Foster, 2007), the dominant studies which have offered important insights into the limitations of the familiarisation thesis have excluded social representations held by individuals living with mental illness (e.g. Jodelet, 1991; Morant, 1995; Rose, 2000) or with HIV/AIDS (Joffe, 1993, 1996) from consideration. Thus, theorists fail to offer a complete picture of the socio-psychological processes that mediate familiarisation of the (feared) unfamiliar or the transformation of the familiarisation process in specific social contexts. While multi-level analysis may be beyond the empirical scope of most individual SRT studies, a multi-level understanding of social representations processes can be developed through greater theoretical reflexivity. This will require explicit recognition of theoretical, methodological and interpretive absences in the general body of work (Gervais et al., 1999) and concrete developments aimed at addressing these absences through engagement with related theories and disciplines (Doise, 1986). SRT studies on illness experiences suggest that operationalising self-knowledge or self-representations as a functional knowledge modality offers important insights for developing SRT in ways that are aligned with the theoretical usefulness of cognitive polyphasia (de-Graft Aikins, 2004, 2006; Markova & Farr, 1995). Broader research on HIV/AIDS provides concrete conceptual insights. First, this body of work suggests that stigmatic thinking and socio-psychological distancing occurs through the communicative practices of lay healthy communities and affected communities. People distance themselves from those affected by HIV/AIDS and people affected by HIV/AIDS distance themselves from 'the healthy' through inter-subjective and subjective processes of stigma consciousness and self-stigmatisation (Parker & Aggleton, 2003; Deacon et al., 2005). Second, the contents and functions of stigmatic thinking, and the nature of socio-psychological distancing, change over time through the communicative and embodied practices of various social groups: (a) the actions of social groups whose ideological aim is to reconstruct society in the face of threat (e.g. researchers, Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), policymakers, donor organisations) (Campbell, 2003; Nguyen, 2010; Illife, 2006) (b) the actions of those with a lived experience of the stigmatised condition whose lives are not circumscribed by the illness or the stigma related to it (Carricaburu & Pierret, 1995; Epstein, 1996) and (c) the

socio-psychological impact of rising prevalence which transforms the illness from a category belonging to stigmatized out-groups to that which increasingly belongs to in-groups (e.g family members, intimate partners) or the self (Low-Beer & Stoneburner, 2003; Stadler, 2003). These nuances in the dynamic nature of social representations of HIV/AIDS come to the fore through a systematic analysis of the subjective, intersubjective, group and structural levels of social organization. Treating self-knowledge as a legitimate modality of knowledge within the cognitive polyphasia framework, along the lines suggested for emotions, creates the opportunity to develop a truly integrative analysis of the psychological, social and cultural functions and outcomes of openness to the unfamiliar in specific contexts. At one level, self-knowledge will co-exist with other modalities of knowledge in making sense of the unfamiliar in everyday life, especially when the unfamiliar is of personal relevance. Secondly, self-knowledge is likely to mediate communicative and behavioural functions of heterogeneous social knowledge through one's cognitive style or emotional disposition (albeit within the confines of inter-subjective, group and cultural dynamics). Thus, self-knowledge aids a more comprehensive understanding of how different categories of unfamiliar are absorbed or rejected at different levels of social organisation. Self-knowledge also fixes attention to the way social and embodied emotions, mediate familiar-unfamiliar encounters whether they are unexpected or actively sought.

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