The Crisis in Social Psychology under Neoliberalism: Reflections from Social Representations Theory

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This article examines the material and ideational conditions in academia and broader society under neoliberalism and their effects on social psychology, both as an academic community and as a source of knowledge production. Social Representations Theory (SRT) – embedded in the discipline of social psychology – is taken as a case study, which mirrors not only the specific impacts of neoliberalism on the theory and scientific community of SRT, but by extension also on social psychology as a whole. Specifically, we observe how neoliberalism has impacted on SRT's ability to address those features of social psychology which led many scholars to label it 'a discipline in crisis' by the 1960's and which included: its reliance on a realist ontology, positivist epistemology and quantitative methods, as well as the absence of an axiological frame which led to its distancing away from a humanistic, action-oriented social psychology. Rather than lessening these challenges, it is argued that neoliberalism has, in fact, further entrenched them in two interconnected ways. First, at the level of academic practice, neoliberalism has structured academic work or labour in the neoliberal university/academia in ways, which are more consistent with the production of knowledge that subscribes to positivist principles. Second, on a conceptual level the hegemony of neoliberalism has been accompanied by a corresponding hegemony of conceptual and methodological individualism in the social sciences. This in turn has led to an environment conducive to and encouraging of positivist approaches in social psychology.

Keywords: social psychology, social representations theory, neoliberalism, crisis, market-oriented academia, impact factor, positivism.

Positivism v. Interpretivism: The Long Crisis in Social Psychology

The critical epistemological debate, in both social science and social psychology research, relates to whether or not the social world can be studied according to the same principles as the natural sciences (Bryman, 1984). Depending on their standing in this debate, there are two broad opposing epistemological positions: positivism on the one hand and interpretivism - constructivism (anti-positivism) on the other. *Positivism* is based upon the realist ontological position according to which objects have an existence independent of the researcher and external realities can be known objectively

(Morcol, 2001). The overarching objective of positivism is the production of universal laws or generalizable findings (Breen & Darlaston-Jones, 2008). Accordingly, positivism is often linked to empiricism and a corresponding experimental/survey methodology[1] that generates quantitative data (Scotland, J., 2012).[2] Due to positivism's claim to objectivity, positivist approaches also claim to adhere to a value free axiology.[3] Therefore, its practitioners ought to not allow their values influence the research process.[4] On the other hand, *interpretivism* holds that reality can never be objectively observed from the outside; it must be observed from inside through the direct experience of the people (Mack, 2010). Thus, the researcher's role is to "understand, explain, and demystify social reality through the eyes of different participants" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p.19). The interpretivist approach in terms of methodological choices, underpins the general approach of qualitative research as the focus is on understanding as opposed to explanations through the identification of cause and effect relationships (Willis, 2007).

The friction between these two opposing epistemological positions, positivism and interpretivism, has been at the center of debates in social psychology since the 19th century. In 1894, Dilthey argued that "explanatory, natural scientific psychology cannot lie at the basis of a science about the mind, since it does not leave any room for freedom and cannot be reconciled with the problem of culture" (Dilthey, 1894, pp. 37-41; p. 74). Furthermore, in 1914 Lange stated that: "Like Janus, psychology showed two different faces: one turned to physiology and natural science, the other to the sciences of the spirit, history, sociology; one science about causal effects, the other about values" (Lange, 1914, p. 63). Vygotsky considered the key differentiator between the two to lie in the principle, whereby the former focuses on causality and the latter is oriented towards a goal, which is exempt from all material connections. Additionally, he emphasized that what has to be constantly born in mind are the different

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[1] Experimental/survey methodologies: Sampling measurement and scaling, statistical analysis or standardized tests, closed ended questionnaires, standardized observation tools.

[2] According to Pratt however this is marred with many challenges not least owing to the fact that positivist philosophy subscribes to realism or naive realism (Lawson & Staeheli, 1991). To start with, according to Pratt "the empirical regularity observed are but statistical artefacts and not a representation of the real world of mechanism" (Pratt, 2009, p. 381).

[3] Axiology focuses on the place of values in the research process.

[4] Researcher have demonstrated that values were and still are a part of scientific psychological research, which manifests itself even in the interpretative speculation or discussion of results obtained from the analyses of quantitative data It is not possible to entirely eliminate values from the research process; some values are so embedded in researchers' culture that researchers are unconscious that they hold them (Teo, 2008, 2010)

ontological roots, which are causing the divergence and incompatibility between the two fundamentally different theoretical disciplines, whereby "one is causal, the other is teleological and intentional psychology" (Vygotsky, 1927, p.12-13).[5]

Similarly, Kurt Lewin (1890 – 1947), one of the modern pioneers of social, organizational, and applied psychology believed that social psychology could not only further the scientific understanding of humanity, but also advance the cause of human welfare (Lewin, 1931, p.155). Yet, by 1967, the prominent social psychologist Kenneth Ring declared that Lewin's humanistic, action-oriented social psychology had become entirely marginalized (Berkowitz, 1970, p.967). He argued that "experimental social psychology [...] is in a state of profound intellectual disarray" (Ring, 1967, p. 115) and explicitly blamed social psychology for being "more concerned with demonstrating a cute, clever experimental manipulation of the latest theoretical toy than with making serious progress in the task of building a body of worthwhile knowledge" (Ring, 1967; Augoustinos & Walker, 1995, p.2). Others invoked similar arguments to describe the alleged "crisis stage in social psychology". In 1977, Silverman exclaimed that: "the predominant experimental tradition in the field has contributed little for serious export in enlarging and refining our views of social man" (Silverman, 1977, p. 353, 354). He argued that theoretical progress is slow to arrive and that even laboratory-derived knowledge exhibits little of the cumulative character we associate with the scientific method. As acknowledged by Augoustinos & Walker, the crisis declared in the 1960's centred on a "serious perturbation in the dynamic equilibrium between the two paradigms within social psychology: positivism and interpretivism, with the balance shifted overwhelmingly in favour of the former, at the expense of the latter" (Augoustinos & Walker, 1995, p.2).

In the 1960's, while a 'crisis in social psychology' was being declared by numerous voices in the academic community, another important development took place - Social Representations Theory emerged as a new theory in social psychology. It developed in the context of the crisis and in many ways attempted to respond to it by offering a theoretical and analytical framework, which goes back to the ontological and epistemological roots of social psychology, eschewing the positivist approach that was

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[5] According to Graumann (1986), Floyd Allport's (1924) early delineation of social psychology as a behavioral and experimental discipline in his very influential textbook Social Psychology contributed to social psychology becoming an individualized discipline (Graumann, 1986).

being critiqued. Both the 'crisis' as well as the emergence of SRT, took place in the decade, which also marked the onset of neoliberalism. This temporal juncture thus presents an opportunity for a triadic examination that is best summarized by this question: how has neoliberalism impacted on the development of the inherently anti-positivist SRT? First, the key features of SRT and its anti-positivist characteristics are elaborated. Then, neoliberalism is described, including its positivist foundations and implications. Thirdly, the implications of neoliberal ideology on the academic community, as well as knowledge production in SRT are presented.

Social Representations Theory – an anti-positivist response to the crisis in social psychology?

Social Representations Theory was first formulated in 1961 in Paris, with the publication of Serge Moscovici's *Psychoanalysis-Its Image and Its Public*. It focused on exploring the diffusion of psychoanalysis in France as a case-study for examining the "common consciousness" or the ideas, thoughts, images and knowledge which members of a collectivity create and communicate in society, and "to reinstate the primacy of collective concepts such as culture and ideology" (Augoustinos & Walker, 1995, p. 134). One of the key findings of the study was that "it is not simply that different groups and different social contexts affect what people represent. It is the interactive interdependence between them that produces different styles of thinking and communicating" (Markova, 2008, p.479; Moscovici 1961). As Augoustinos & Walker have pointed out: "social representations refer to the stock of common knowledge and information which people share in the form of common-sense theories about the social world, which enable members of a society to be able to construct a social reality". Thus, SRT came to view psychological experience "as being mediated and determined by the individual's belongingness to a collectivity of others who share similar views, experiences and a common environment and language." (Augoustinos & Walker, 1995, p.134). Its objective was "to study social communication and interaction as the sine qua non of social cognition" (Augoustinos & Walker, 1995, p. 137) and to highlight the social, cultural and collective embeddedness of thinking. By implication, SRT's conception of the aims and scope of social psychology were radically separate from the predominant forms of the discipline dominated by behaviourism, and later on by no less reductive cognitivism and throughout this time by a

thoroughgoing individualism (Duveen, 2000). From its outset, SRT's imperative was to answer to the call for a more *social* social psychology in response to what has above been described as the crisis in social psychology dominated by positivism (Augoustinos & Walker, 1995).

The ontological basis for this can be traced back to Moscovici's conviction that the Einsteinian revolution in physics has not only brought about a revolution in the natural sciences, but also in the social sciences as well. While in Newtonian ontology, knowledge is generated by an independent unit, in Einsteinian ontology knowledge is generated by interaction (Markova, 2008, p.471). Moscovici was inspired by the concept of the electromagnetic field, which Einstein argued, can be understood as the totality of forces that exists "between the two charges and not from the behaviour of individual particles" (Einstein and Infeld, 1938/1961, p. 151). What this implies for the ontology of social psychology as developed in SRT is that social behaviour cannot be rightly considered to equate to the sum of individual behaviours. Instead, SRT distances itself from the atomistic notion of the individual and sees her "in a dialectical relationship with society (its conventions, norms and values) and as an active participant who can effect change in society" (Augoustinos & Walker, 1995, p. 135). It is from such ontological precepts that issues of *dynamism*, *constructivism, transformation* and *social change* stem as the key distinguishing features of the theory. The anti-positivist implications are palpable: to understand the construction of practical, consensual knowledge, or to describe such a complex object as a representation, required more than just laboratory studies. However, since no theories develop in a social vacuum, the key question of concern is how the broader hegemony of neoliberalism impacted on the inherently anti-positivist SRT.

Neoliberalism, the Crisis in Social Psychology and SRT

Friedrich von Hayek (1899-1992) – considered to be one of the ideational fathers of neoliberalism – laid the epistemological basis of neoliberalism through a critical engagement with classical sociology (Gane, 2014). He espoused the view that "social science should give priority in the first instance to that which is individual", rather than starting with 'the whole' (Hayek, 1952). Moreover, he argued that "rather than studying entities- such as society or capitalism- as given 'wholes', the laws of which can be discovered through observation, it is necessary instead to employ a method that constitutes wholes by connecting

together individual elements" (Hayek, 1952, p.152). In 1953, Milton Friedman[6] in his *Essays on Positive Economics,* formulated a new type of economics which would be 'independent of any particular ethical position or normative judgement' and which sought to develop theories that "can yield valid and meaningful predictions about phenomena not yet observed" (Friedman, 1953, p.4). It is on such positivist epistemological basis that neoliberalism – the ideology behind the most recent stage in the development of capitalist society (since the end of the 1960's) – was set. It could be argued that the epistemological inconsistency between neoliberal positivism and SRT's anti-positivism already set them on a collision course. However, it is in the practical and far-reaching repercussions of neoliberalism that the concrete implications of these contradictions are best elucidated.

Neoliberalism was propelled forward by a set of monetary and fiscal policies enforced by the corporate capitalist class in response to the economic turmoil of the 1970s aimed at overthrowing the Keynesian welfare-state economics and curbing the power of labour (Harvey, 2005, p. 209). It is based on the belief that a free market coupled with state deregulation of the economy is the optimal way of organising all exchanges of goods and services (Friedman 1962). It has been described as a hegemonic system, one whose moral imperative has been to remake the social world in the image of a market narrowly construed (Zamora, 2015, p. 43). Its far-reaching consequences have included the privatization of public assets; vastly diminished state responsibility over areas of social welfare; the corporatization of human services, and monetary and social policies congenial to corporations and disregardful of the consequences: poverty, rapid depletion of resources, irreparable damage to the biosphere and more (Brown, 2003).

Neoliberalism's influence however has not stopped there, as it has come to influence academia as well as knowledge production in general. This has come as a consequence of the impact of what Foucault has described as neoliberal governmentality and the constitution of neoliberal subjects. Namely, as neoliberal governmentality has portrayed certain attributes as preferable and desirable (individuality, initiative, self-reliance, competitiveness, ambitiousness, and risk taking), it has led to the constitution of neoliberal subjectivities, which internalize the norms of neoliberalism. These are said to include the organisation of

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[6] Milton Friedman is considered to be the pioneer of neoliberal economics in the US.

life as autonomous "atoms" of self-interest who are morally responsible for navigating the social realm using rational choice and cost-benefit calculations grounded on market-based principles to the exclusion of all other ethical values and social interests (Zamora, 2015; Augoustinos & Walker, 1995, p. 293). According to Sugarman (2015), by institutionalizing the above-described values, neoliberalism has had not only normative consequences, but also, ontological ones, extending to the very psychological constitution of persons. In view of the fact that neoliberalism constituted in these ways has been considered hegemonic, it can be surmised that academics, including social psychology and SRT researchers are shaped by and reproduce this worldview (Nafstad, 2002; Nafstad et al., 2007). What is more, beyond their susceptibility to neoliberal governmentality as individuals in a neoliberal system, academics have also been influenced by it as academic workers in neoliberal universities. At the level of academic practice, neoliberalism has structured academic work or labour in the neoliberal university/academia in ways, which are more consistent with the production of knowledge that subscribes to positivist principles. Second, on a conceptual level the hegemony of neoliberalism has been accompanied by a corresponding hegemony of conceptual and methodological individualism in the social sciences. Each are elaborated in turn in the following sections.

Academic work or labour in the neoliberal university/academia

The neoliberal political project, with its focus on privatization and austerity, has impacted on the public character and financial sustainability of universities (Teo & Febbraro, 2003).[7] As state funds available for financing higher education and research have shrunk over the last three decades and particularly so since the financial crisis in 2008, it has resulted in an exponential rise in the casualisation and precariousness among academics, as well as in the intensification of work. A key characteristic of neoliberal academia has been the proliferation of a culture of surveillance through the introduction of new and distinct modes of surveillance regimes of audit, and 'qualculation' aimed at calculating and monitoring academics' performances (Gill, 2014). As a result, "any individual academic in the UK can now be ranked and

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[7] Academia has become a highly competitive arena whose most important features include publishing papers, participating and organizing in conferences, applying for and administering research grants, participating in various peer-review processes, communicating with colleagues and students, as well as the didactic aspects such as teaching and the public transmission of scholarly knowledge (Teo & Febbraro, 2003).

measured on more than 100 different scales and indices, which measure academics' value and monetise them" (Burrows, 2012, p.366). It is on the basis of such metrics, which mostly focus on publications in international indexed journals that funding is generated, tenure is attained, cases for redundancies are based and courses are closed down (Biswas and Kirchherr, 2015). As a direct consequence of this since 1992, there has been a sharp reduction in books in favour of articles, whilst the proportion of journal articles more than doubled, making up over 80 per cent of social science submissions by 2014 (HEFCE, 2016). Academics from the SRT community have acknowledged that "books have lost their value in the eyes of evaluators who use simplistic indicators as 'impact factors', which are defined only for journals and cannot be used for books" (De Rosa, 2014; Larivière et al, 2006, p. 56). This is hardly the case for the UK alone, as similar practices have been reported around the world (De Rosa, 2013, 2012). One of the reasons is certainly the fact that publishing in Journals allows academics to be included in highly influential databases that track citations and impact, such as Thomson Reuters' Web of Science and Elsevier's Scopus.

In consequence, academia has become a highly competitive arena, whilst academics have turned into one of the most surveyed occupational groups (De Rosa, 2014). Thus, "the very nature of education has been reformulated in instrumental terms to connect it to business and the economy, whilst corporate management techniques have been introduced in the universities" (Callon & Law, 2005, p.719). This has led many critical scholars to conclude that nowadays, "it is no longer enough to say that Universities are like businesses; Universities are businesses" (Elias & Gill, 2016). As academics collectively have become a more flexible workforce, responding with 'hair trigger responsiveness' (Thrift 2000, p. 679) to new calls for papers or funding streams, in a drive to constantly develop 'impact', academic neoliberal subjectivities have been constructed. In turn, academic neoliberal subjectivities have impacted on the type and content of knowledge that has been produced in social psychology under neoliberalism. We turn to this discussion next, combining theoretical and empirical insights from the SRT community.

Neoliberalism, academic subjectivity, positivism and SRT

As described earlier, SRT is based on an interactional epistemology. The concept of social representations comes from a philosophical tradition that is rooted in social dynamics, cultural-historical and social bases

of human thinking, consciousness and the unconscious, and emphasis on social practices (Markova, 2008, p. 467). According to Quenza, a large number of social psychologists were attracted to the study of representations in reaction to the individualization of the social and the hegemony of positivism in mainstream social psychology, as well as the dynamic and innovative character of SRT (Quenza, 2005). In contrast to this, it is exactly the individualization of the social, atomization and hegemony of positivism, which have been both the roots and the products of neoliberalism. The preoccupation with individuality and the understanding of individuals as self-sufficient units stems from a realist ontology and positivist epistemologies, which consider individuals to be units separate from society. It can thus be argued that the dynamic, interactional and social ontology and epistemology of SRT are directly at odds with the ontology and epistemology of neoliberalism as a predominant socio-political philosophy. The contradiction of SRT with the ontology and epistemology of neoliberal governmentality has not only symbolic consequences, but also consequences in knowledge production. Namely, neoliberalism like any other hegemonic discourse favours and rewards certain paradigmatic choices, which in turn produces certain research outputs — or 'products'— instead of others. The impact on the form of knowledge production has been amongst the most prevalent ways in which neoliberalism has influenced academic outputs. There are three ways in which neoliberalism has encouraged positivism in social psychology, and thus discouraged the anti-positivist SRT:

> *1. Influence through the preferred format of publication in neoliberal academia*

> *2. Influence through the preferred research methods in neoliberal academic*

> *3. Influence through (absence of) axiology/value concerns in neoliberal academia*

In an attempt to unravel the above-described impacts on neoliberalism on SRT, and anti-positivist social psychology in general, we interweave theoretical with empirical insights from interviews with members of the SRT community. We draw on the responses from a combination of two methods, with a combined sample of N=48 members of the SRT community:

GROUP A: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with forty (N=40) members of the academic community, randomly selected from the participants at the 13 International Conference on Social Representations (CIRS) in Marseilles, France, 14-17 September 2016.[8] This represents approximately 10% of all 400 Conference participants. The main criteria for inclusion were participation in the Conference as a registered attendee. The respondents included Postdoc students, early career researchers as well as established Professors. A semi-structured process was followed whereby the interviewees were encouraged to elaborate on their answers more extensively if they felt urged to do so. Not all interview answers are reported here. Only those relevant for the analysis as developed in the present work have been extracted and presented.

GROUP B: In-depth non-directive interviews were conducted between September 2016 and January 2017 with eight professors and young researchers (N=8) at three Universities[9], which belong to the SRT international network. We did not use a predefined question list, but focused each interview on the research goals: understanding the scholars' experiences in nowadays academia, as well as their viewpoints on SRT. A typical interview started with a question about the academic path of the participant – a general request that helped reveal contextual information about the participants' personal experiences, but also served as a starting point to engage the conversation.

Our positioning at the time of conducting the interviews was as members of the SRT – doctoral students enrolled in the European/International Joint PhD in S.R. & C. Research Centre and Multimedia Lab, University of Sapienza, Italy, 2014-2017. In order to explore the accounts of the participants, a thematic classification was manually developed to summarize the data, with divisions reflecting the subjects of enquiry. To illustrate the thematic analysis, we use verbatim quotations from the transcript as evidence or explanation. The responses to the interview questions are interwoven with theoretical analysis over the three ways in which neoliberalism created conditions, which are inconsistent with anti-positivist SRT.

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[8] The Conference represents the biggest annual event for the SRT community. Since 1992, it is held biannually, alternating in organization in and outside Europe, and including international scholars.

[9] University of Sapienza, University of Lausanne, University of Geneva

1) Influence through the preferred format of publication in neoliberal academia

Researchers from both interviewed groups reported that the academic system pushes them to the wall, where they are forced to renounce certain values and "play the institutional game" of their academic settings. Indeed, the pressures of competition and evaluation are seen as a major challenge in the academic environment. When inquired about what motivates researchers in choosing a format of publication over another, one scholar replied:

"Researchers want to be acknowledged by their peers, to make a name for oneself. So basically, they write articles because that is what pays most" (Scholar from group b).

Researchers are well aware of the factors which impact academic success. The pressure to publish in 'impact factor journals' is well illustrated in answers to the question about what constitutes academic success nowadays:

"What is important comes from personal experience. Marketwise, it is about what sells and what is trendy" (Scholar from group a).

The general feeling observed amongst the respondents was one of frustration at the unfairness and stressfulness of the academic system and the predominance of the market values in Universities:

"In general this is imposed by the Universities, so the people try to publish in high impact factor Journals or Journals with high prestige. We all do that, it is imposed by the system. Publish or perish. If you don't play by it, you don't survive." (Scholar from group a).

The impact factor and the prestige of the Journal were listed as the key factors determining the choice of Journal amongst the SRT community reported here. These developments in academia have impacted knowledge production in several ways. The first has been through its influence on the format of publication outputs and by implication also the conceptual frameworks and research paradigms chosen. Unanimously (48/48) of the interviewed members of the SRT community confirmed the hypothesis that books have been almost entirely side-tracked by Journal articles.

"Articles are the preferred option because of the evaluation of scientific output, the impact factors. Books take a similar effort but less gain. There is a strong hierarchy in publication formats. Before it was books that were preferred because it is easier to express ideas, there are less editorial constraints." (Scholar from group a)

"Articles are expected most of the time, you need a certain number of national and international publications to get your credits and your PhD. If you want to climb the academic hierarchy you need to publish journal articles" (Scholar from group b)

"I think it's basically about the criteria imposed by the CNU. To pass the CNU (National Council of Universities), books do not matter." (Scholar from group a)

"Publishers do not have the means nor the scope to publish books anymore. Articles have better ratings (in more than one dimension) and are important for grant applications." (Scholar from group a)

Indeed, in an academic setting marked by the imperative of qualculations, books do not seem to be a rational choice. The preference of Journal articles at the expense of books has come as the result of the preference for algorithmically demonstrable excellence, which is more easily tracked in various influential databases, and which is easily understood and deployed by administrators who seek to audit and surveille their employees. Often, books and book chapters cannot be submitted by academics to the

evaluation agencies or committee to demonstrate their best scientific outcomes, because the algorithms that judge the research's impact do not comprise indicators based on "book evaluation", (De Rosa, 2014, p. 39, 2009).

The preference of Journal article publications at the expense of the publication of books has an impact on the content and substance produced. Indeed, the content produced, represents knowledge which is diffused and circulated in society, and through which existing forms of injustice are either maintained or challenged. Thus, it can also be considered to be an aspect of neoliberal governmentality. As Kolozova has argued, the favouring of publishing Journal articles instead of books has multiple implications, as it is direct collision with the more traditionally accepted scales on determining the category of paper in social sciences and humanities. Namely, contrary to practices in natural and technical sciences, in these academic fields the most important achievement is publication of a monograph and not an article that often has the form of research summary or report (Kolozova, 2013). Attempting to fit social sciences into molds adapted from the applied sciences, affects not only the type of output, but also its substance. Social science research may rely more on language and elaboration. Restraining it to the requirements of academic journals may lead both to alienation and demotivation by researchers, but also to lack of funding and appreciation of more traditionally performed research and output (Kolozova, 2013).

2) Influence through the preferred research methods in neoliberal academic

The choice of methodology is inseparably connected with the ontological and epistemological precepts of a chosen theory, and it impacts on the relationship with the subjects, the way in which data is dealt with and interpreted, as well as on the results obtained. What is more, the choice of methodology can also be highly ideological, as oftentimes relations of oppression and inequality are kept undisclosed because of the method chosen (Teo, 2009). According to Moscovici, empirical work is important, but if one assumes the constructivist perspective as SRT, (social) psychological research should be undertaken from conceptual and methodological approaches other than those of experimental psychology (Farr, 1983).

Indeed, Moscovici was concerned with the nature of social psychological method, including the method in SRT. He repeatedly warned against duplicating research methods from the natural sciences in social psychology and SRT. He was primarily concerned with the way in which such methods give priority to data collection rather than theory (Moscovici, 1992, p.108). SRT thus emphasizes the use of multiple methods as long as they contribute to solving the research problem in question (Markova, 2008). Broadly speaking, methodological strategies in SRT should take into account the complexity of the phenomena under investigation and pay attention to the context and the diversity of voices instead of rely on a quantitative method for the purpose of answering to the requirements of neoliberal academia. However, pressures in an opposite direction have been numerous. For instance, Markova has shown that socialisation into mechanistic and empiricist presuppositions in those who were educated in the "Western" tradition are very strong. Although they may be sympathetic to, and adopt the theory of social representations, these researchers do not escape from, time to time, unwittingly falling back into mechanistic and empiricist presuppositions (Markova, 2008, p. 467). Indeed, Moscovici's warnings have hardly been sufficient to deter the pressures of neoliberal academia in the SRT community of researchers.

Thus, although SRT subscribes to anti-positivist principles, which are more consistent with qualitative methodologies, SRT practice however seems to be a victim of the broader hegemony of quantitative methods (Tomicic, 2018). Contrary to expectations, the results demonstrated that the choice of methodology is often automatic and does not include considerations of its consistency with the epistemological basis of SRT:

"I feel a lot of researchers, in order to boost their CV, don't think in very sophisticated epistemological terms; they don't aim at understanding something that is fundamentally interesting, they only want to find some new research framework to get it published... So, everything you do is to pierce into the publication system..." (Scholar from group a).

"Quantitative methods are easier to sell" (Scholar from group a)

"The method of SRT itself, I never really applied it. Especially because it requires interviews at a certain point […] I must say we never really reconsidered the idea of interviews for this project. And sometimes I think we just lack time. Yes, the time you can dedicate to a thesis is short, even with experimental methods – I think there's this expectation for you to generate a lot of outputs, and to give it out very fast. So we try to experiment quite rapidly." (Scholar from group a).

"Logically, it (methodology) should come about from the topic of research. But there is this tendency towards scientificity, which is not necessarily realistic, but we will use experimental methods to achieve it for example. It might not even be the best match to approach a topic of research." (Scholar from group b)

"Ideally, the methodology is defined by the research questions. However, in practice, methods are chosen which justify our being scientists. There is focus on data and not on content. A focus group can give you more insight than a survey with 700 participants." (Scholar from group a)

The responses indicate a highly concerning trend, bearing in mind that a researcher using quantitative methods is hardly equipped to grasp the many subtleties, revealing silences, undertones, hints and insinuations on the part of informants, judged as soft data and consequently dismissed as scientifically unreliable. Qualitative approaches are inherently concerned with the subtlety and complexity of human social life in a way that is more consistent with SRT. However, it is the positivist tendencies of neoliberal academia, which seem to discourage qualitative methodologies. The obsession with natural sciences in social psychology in general has meant that anything that cannot be measured, such as human subjectivity and experience, is not scientific and therefore is of less importance (Roberts, R., 2015, p. 91). According to Roberts, this has lead to the following result: "work using anything other than quantitative methods and which inquires into forms of human subjectivity is automatically rated as being of a lower quality by academic assessors so thoroughly conditioned into market requirements that they frequently assess the

supposed quality of such work without even reading it" (Roberts, R., 2015, p. 91). Since quantitative methodologies are consistent with positivist epistemologies, it can be argued that the bibliometric culture has created a corresponding preference for positivist approaches in social psychology.

What is more, as de Rosa, a scholar from the SRT community maintains: "Scientific quality is critical for the viability of any discipline and for making an informed and responsible contribution to societal debates. But the sole emphasis on number of publications, impact factors and the like, contributes to an unwelcome homogenisation of the field in general, and of European social psychology in particular" (de Rosa, A.S., 2014, p. 2). Unsurprisingly, there seems to be a general reluctance in mainstream social psychology journals to publish articles with the framework of SRT: "Prestigious mainstream social psychology journals like the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, the Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, and the Journal of Social Issues never published articles on SR, while another prestigious journal, Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, has only published two articles on SR" (Eicher, 2011, pp. 11.8-11.9):

3) Influence through (absence of) axiology/value concerns in neoliberal academia

The founder of SRT, Serge Moscovici has stated: "the central and exclusive object of social psychology should be the study of all that pertains to ideology and to communication from the point of view of their structure, their genesis and their function" (Moscovici, 1972, p.55-6). Neoliberalism, in view of the far and deep reaching influence, certainly represents a suitable topic for investigation in social psychology. The study of neoliberalism within SRT and Social Psychology would imply the study of social psychological processes and mechanisms by which certain social representations and constructions of the world as developed and promulgated within the disciplines, serve to legitimate, maintain and reproduce the existing institutional arrangements, social and power relations within neoliberal society (Augoustinos & Walker, 1995, p. 288). And yet, Sugarman finds that although there is great attention to neoliberalism

among scholars in disciplines such as sociology and economics, there is comparatively little discussion of neoliberalism and its consequences among psychologists and social psychologist (Sugarman, 2005, p. 104). McDonald & Wearing have also acknowledged this trend: "Mainstream social psychology has retained a relatively narrow theoretical focus on cognition at the expense of developing relevant, applicable and politically engaged understandings of contemporary social life that assist in addressing and resisting the consequences of the rise of consumerism (McDonald, Wearing, 2016, p.117).

Nafstad & Blakar (2012) locate the disregard the study of ideology in social psychology in the historically individualized nature of mainstream social psychology. One of the ways in which positivist epistemologies eschew the study of ideology is the lack of valid and reliable methods within this paradigm to study ideology and the incompatibility of positivism with the study of ideology. According to McDonald & Wearing, the predominantly cognitive approach to self-identity adopted by mainstream social psychological theories and illustrate some of the limitations with explaining identity primarily through universal, internal cognitive processes divorced from considerations of broader social structure, economic organisation and cultural context (McDonald, Wearing, 2016, p.118). Another possible reason could be that it is not a neutral and ''scientific'' concept, which as we have seen positivism considers as crucial criteria within its research paradigm. Thus, ideology doesn't render itself analyzable by the preferred quantitative methods prevalent today, which is one of the consequences of the hegemony of positivism.

An additional reason why neoliberalism has not been researched in social psychology, could be the nature of neoliberal academia. According to Wheelan, as the time to deliberate, think, read, research and write has diminished alongside diminished budgets, so have academic freedom and independence also decreased. He suggests that this has meant that the valuing and understanding of intellectual, academic and general human activities, have come to be colonised by the economic rationality prevalent under neoliberalism, which has in turn led to new labouring subjectivities in academia. Consequently, "discussions of power, politics, social justice, are embraced, as something that might be gestured toward in a predictably bracketed way for students, but this is not ordinarily expected to be followed through and brought to bear within the institution itself" (Whelan, 2015, p.38). Similarly, Sparkes argues that "as

precariousness, time pressure and surveillance, the profound feelings of anxiety, shame, fraudulence have become prevalent in neoliberal higher education today, they have come to influence not only on the lives of academics and their experience within academic institutions, but also the form and substance of their scientific production as well" (Sparkes, 2007, p.230). The increase in academics' teaching commitments, as well as the increased competitiveness of publication and the expansion of duties, has caused the amount of time available to deliberate, think, read, research and write to plummet; academic freedom and independence has also decreased. As a result of these tendencies, social psychology as a discipline has allowed neoliberalism's emergence as a hegemonic social representation[10] and a "common sense" form of thinking to be under-considered and under-examined. Indeed, academic initiatives such as the Leiden Manifesto or the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment represent the countermovement against the metrics culture and marketization in higher education which neglects to measure and thus account for other aspects of research (social impact, didactic influence, emancipatory value) (Cagan, 2013; Hicks et al., 2015). As Pečarić emphasizes, "The very purpose of social science is not to be competitive, but to understand culture and society and to serve as a public good. It generally has no direct commercial potential and serves no profit. [...] The ultimate consequence of the use of bibliometrics for that purpose would be the colonization of social sciences and their subordination to the values of globalization and profit" (Pečarić, 2013, p. 355).

Thus, the hegemony of positivism in Social Psychology has meant that many key problems that should concern Social Psychology, such as ideology, aspects of human social interaction embedded in culture, and common sense had not been examined, simply because they are not amenable to direct study in the lab. Indeed, participants from both groups emphasized that such political impact of research is overshadowed by the predominance of impact factor measurements, which doesn't take into account the normative value of the research, only its citations in accounting for success in academia:

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[10] Hegemonic representations are described by Moscovici (1988) as being contemporary variants of collective representations: they are coercive, uniform, and unchallenged. An example of a contemporary collective, or hegemonic, representation is individualism (Farr, 1998). It is a pervasive assumption which is often unquestioned in contemporary society. For example, it is embedded in our meritocratic institutions such as school and university, in which it is the taken for granted assumption that the unit of grading is the individual" (Gillespie, 2008)

"Ideally, what is important is the ability to explain reality and contribute to it through teaching and involvement, participation in local developments. In reality, impact factor and acknowledged dominant positions" (Scholar from group b).

"What I find to be a pity is that we are supposed to become researchers and professors, but the only thing that is valued is the research part and publishing. Not even conference communication or teaching. It's a shame." (Scholar from group a).

However, there seems to be a high level of awareness about the interconnectedness between research choices and ideology:

"Most of all it is the aim of the research that determines this. But also how you understand the social problem. It's also an ideological question/ to understand, question and explain in certain ways. Method is ideology. It's related with epistemology/ how we want to approach social issues." (Scholar from group a)

"If in order to publish, I need to address topics that I don't like, or to tackle topics I like with methods I don't subscribe to, I will not do it. […] But to make a name for yourself, you need to play this institutional game so you kind of face a dilemma… So, you take the risks of playing that game, and you think 'once I make it, I'll get my ideas across'. But by taking this risk, you risk changing your ideas, that the institution overpowers your ideas and motivations" (Scholar from group a).

"Everyone concerned with social issues has a certain value system. If you care about what people think, it's social concern. Most social scientists are left leaning, and it shows in their research and results. It shows in the methodology (a constructivist approach is more democratic)." (Scholar from group b)

"They always say a researcher should be neutral, put his ideologies aside, but I clearly can't do that nor do I think any human is capable of doing it, and I actually don't want to do it. […] I'm not going to

relegate my values and myself, at least I hope I'll stick to this and won't do like everyone else playing the

game of academia. I don't want a career in research at any cost" (Scholar from group a).

Conclusion

The crisis in social psychology was rooted in the predominance of a positivist epistemology, coupled with the methodological attempt to simulate a natural science through the reliance on quantitative methods, as well as its distancing from a humanistic, action-oriented social science. As it has been argued here, these issues have not only not been solved by neoliberalism, but deteriorated under its influence: individual subjectivity among researchers has been transformed into neoliberal subjectivity, whilst academia and its related institutions have been remodelled in its own "market-focused" image. Crucially, it is the ontology of realism, epistemology of positivism and the quantitative methods, which have been argued here to be consistent and commensurable to the neoliberal "political project", and thus appear to be both favoured and hegemonic within present-day academic research in SRT and social psychology. This seems to confirm what Ian Parker has asserted in a regretful tone: "Social Psychology has not learnt the lesson that the result [of a structural/scientistic influence on the study of Social Representations] is a positivist approach to meaning which conceals within it a phenomenological individualism, [while] postmodern pluralism recognized that it is not reality which is too complex or too rich but that there is always something more to be said" (Parker, I., 1989, pp. 103-137).

Social Representations Theory, in spite of its inherent anti-positivism, has hardly remained immune to the broader trends in neoliberalism. The same kind of quantitative methodology and value neutral axiology that are characteristic of positivism, have also become pervasive in the SRT community. The production and dissemination of knowledge in SRT has been impacted a result. Neoliberalism has thus continued psychology's problematic insistence on the ontology of realism, epistemology of positivism and preference for quantitative methods, even within the realm of SRT. If we agree that indeed neoliberalism has had normative and ontological consequences, which currently remain under-researched in social psychology, there are three key conclusions that can be drawn: First, the crisis of social psychology

continues under neoliberalism. Secondly, if social psychology is to be useful and relevant, it will need to reflect on the individualistic bias of much of social psychological theory, to engage with the complicity of the epistemological and methodological approaches of social psychology with the ideational foundations of consumer culture, and to take a politically active stance towards resisting the potentially harmful effects of neo-liberal consumer culture on self-identity, social relationships and the environment in which they occur (McDonald & Wearing, 2016, p.120). Third, if we acknowledge the neoliberalization of academia is impacting the development of the Theory of Social Representations in the ways this paper argues, what follows is the incompatibility of intellectual freedom with the current system. If it is so, we must critically engage with the dominant socio-economic policies, which affect not only our work but society at large. As Sugarman has argued: "Only by interrogating neoliberalism, psychologists' relationship to it, how it affects what people are and might become, and whether it is good for human well-being can we understand the ethics of psychological disciplinary and professional practices in the context of a neoliberal political order and if we are living up to our social responsibility (Sugarman, 2015, p.103).

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