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Theorizing Social Ideations: Beyond the Divide between Humanities and Social Sciences

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Abstract: This article briefly reviews the historical changes in the social theories of collective cognition/knowledge, and reveals a classical divide between two major, supposedly rival, paradigms that still influence mainstream studies, i.e., (1) the realist determinist; and (2) the subjectivist constructionist. This division has prevailed in both humanities and social-behavioral sciences until recent challenges by critical realism and synthesizing trends. In fact, a growing number of meta-theoretical speculations have recently advocated a conciliatory orientation conceptualizing social reality in terms of an interaction between social agency and social structure. However, a genuinely integrative trend is required to incorporate the ideational aspects of social realities into its agenda as a third dimension by acknowledging an ‘autonomous ontological status’ for ideation in relation to human agency and social structures. Nevertheless, due to current global changes and the consequent emerging modes of consciousness, there is a need to reformulate our notions of knowledge and cognition under a new concept; what I refer to here as ‘social ideation’. ‘Social ideation’ sits within a multidimensional and comprehensive model in which the complexity of the concept and the autonomy of its ontological status are well recognized. Finally, the article outlines a new approach, titled ‘social ideation studies’ (SIS) which constitutes a meta-theoretical base for integrative and interdisciplinary studies.

Keywords: Social Ideation, Social Cognition, Humanities, Ontological Status, Sociology of Knowledge, Critical Realism

Introduction

This article begins by establishing a general but primary sense of what will be discussed later as ‘social ideation’ and then argues for the necessity of developing an integrative approach to studying such an essential but undertheorized aspect of human cognition. It attempts to contribute to this new agenda by defining the concept of social ideation, discussing its multidimensionality, and finally, developing a general comprehensive framework for research and debate. This paper only speaks to those ‘social theorists’ and social philosophers that have attempted to theorize the ‘ideational aspects of social realities’ and ‘social ideation processes,’ under the rubric of a few key terms such as ‘social cognition,’ ‘social knowledge’ or ‘social representations.’ Using Zerubavel’s (1997) classification, I will limit the scope of my discussion to the ‘social theories’ of cognition (cognitive sociology, sociology of knowledge/thoughts, and cognitive social psychology or social cognition theory) and thereby exclude cognitive individualism, cognitive psychology, and cognitive universalism.

In particular, it will be noted that due to the recently growing number of integrative and conciliatory efforts in defining social realities, there are appealing prospects for redefining what we mean by the ideational/cognitive/subjective aspect of these realities. I will argue that a truly integrative approach requires a multidimensional and comprehensive research
approach in which the contradictory complexity of human ideation and the autonomy of its ontological status are well recognized. It is important to note that, due to the word limit, I do not aim to construct nor empirically examine such an approach in detail. Rather, I argue for the necessity of such efforts and by relying on a ‘dialectical critical realist’ account of ideas (Bhaskar 1997 and Archer 2003), I attempt to outline the principles of this comprehensive, interdisciplinary advancement. The approach, under the rubric of ‘social ideation studies’ (SIS) and based on a focal concept, ‘social ideation,’ potentially provides us with a flexible framework that transcends the limitations of current mainstream approaches and contributes to other recent conciliatory attempts.

Social Ideation, Split between Realism and Subjectivism

I start with a general and preliminary definition of what I would like to call ‘social ideation.’ By this term, I initially mean the cognitive processes through which not only ideas and meanings are created by social agents who are involved in social interactions, while being conditioned by the pre-existing social structures, but also the ideational/subjective aspects of these social structures, institutions, processes and realities, that are constantly formed and transformed. I will argue that social ideations must be considered as the third dimension to human agency and social structures.

Apart from some limited applications in psychology (such as ‘suicide ideations’) and philosophy, the term ideation has not gained currency among social theorists beyond its ordinary uses as a catchphrase. The term, according to the Oxford Dictionary of Psychology was originally coined by a Scottish philosopher, James Mill (1829), to be used as a conceptual tool to refer to “all different phenomena to which the term Idea relates” (Colman 2009). However, despite the capacity of this concept to cover a lot of territory, including emotions as one of its forms (Solomon 1997), from the beginning, and perhaps due to the empiricist spirit of the 19th century, the imaginative and even illusory connotations of the term have been highlighted (in contrast to sensations).

However, in 1997, a progressive effort was made by a group of humanities scholars to emancipate the idea of ideation and attract attention to its ontological totality and potential theoretical use. The result was a collection of social philosophical discussions in a special issue of the Journal for the Theories of Social Behaviour (see Smith 1997, Bhaskar 1997, Solomon 1997). Despite the very important and justifiable points made by the authors in that issue, the translation of these metatheoretical debates into an applicable research program is an agenda that remains to be pursued. The aim of this article is to realize part of this agenda by not only acknowledging the reality of ideas and ideations, but also by locating them in the most appropriate place in relation to human agency and social structures. I argue that a critical dialectical analysis of the relation between agency and structure (the core of recent integrative approaches) is incomplete without considering ideation as the third dimension.

As explained in the last section of this paper, this will require recognition of the “ontological autonomy” of ideations, meaning that they are “causally and taxonomically irreducible” social realities (Bhaskar 1997).

As Bhaskar (1997) argues, the detotalization of ideations in social sciences has led to splits and dualisms in the ontological accounts (what is the true nature of ideation/cognition?). These splits have also been translated into the epistemological (what makes our understanding of ideations valid) and methodological assumptions (what is the best way of achieving this
valid understanding). In the course of the secularization of metaphysics at the end of the Middle Ages and through the formation of Western social sciences, debates around cognition, thought, ideas and knowledge became more practical than virtual. This trend to secularize authoritative knowledge, as Lee and Wallerstein (2001) describe, led to a growing split between knowledge of what was true and knowledge of what was good. The former was claimed to be achieved only through the study of natural things, science, and the latter through the study of the arts and humanities. Writing in the 1950s, C. P. Snow described the emergence of two cultures, namely ‘science’ and ‘humanities,’ which had become so divergent in language and worldview that they had even lost the ability to communicate with one another (Heckathorn 2001: 273-84). Together with this division, the autonomy of science (as a set of claims on truth) increased, and the newly borne social sciences adopted a scientistic methodological feature in search of popular credibility (see Hayek 1943). It was under these conditions, with the exception of some marginalized philosophical trends, that ‘ideation’ became the subject of empiricist, naturalist studies. In brief, it was reduced to and objectified as the mechanisms of individual minds. The naturalist philosophy of mind as a distinct area emerged and grew in the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century (Cavallaro 2001: 149).

Since the materialization of the modern studies of ideation, and especially in the period of 1940s-1970s, many concepts and terms have been invented by different disciplines and perspectives in social sciences to address this phenomenon and its dimensions: frames, social knowledge, social representation, social imagination, social cognition, discourse, social construction, collective consciousness, social epistemology, belief systems, social attitudes, social images, social learning and so on. The growing attention to human cognition – i.e. the process and product of knowing individually, collectively and socially – not only attracted different areas of study but also led to the creation of new specialized, but fragmented, spaces such as: cognitive (social) psychology, sociology of knowledge, sociology and history of ideas, sociology of science, the studies of ideology, and the field of intellectual history.

To put all this in simple terms, there was no reason to reduce the study of ‘ideations’ into the differentiated aspects of social life. However, predominant dissensions between science and humanities, and between social sciences and behavioral sciences, have reduced the presumable complexity of ‘ideation’ into separate and even confrontational levels of analysis: more importantly, the macro-micro, subjective-objective, agential-structural, and everyday life-institutional (formal) levels. As shown by Hosseini (2003, 2010b), the history of the study of ideation in social sciences can be divided into three main periods: (1) the pre-1960s dominance of scientism, objectivism, materialism and behavioral determinism; (2) the post-1960s subjectivist swing towards embracing culture and language, and adopting post-materialist views; and finally, (3) the post-1990s rise of demands for meta-theoretical integration. Despite a paradigmatic shift in the 1960s, it can still be argued that the first two periods were both influenced by a common dualist reductionism rooted in the science vs. humanities, or nature vs. culture divide, which still persists. However, the social and political changes at the global level in the last couple of decades have had significant implications for the studies of social ideations.

In reducing the social and cultural aspects of human life to the logic of the economy, neoliberalism and the neo-classical mode of thinking have stimulated resistance in the political culture of many so-called new social movements, causing them to transform beyond their community values and identity concerns. Although these movements have reconstructed
themselves by addressing material and infrastructural issues, they try to define them as the most constitutive parts of so-called post-materialist values such as political participation and dignity. The retreat of the welfare state does not necessitate the resurrection of early cruel industrial capitalism and therefore the discrediting of cultural and cognitive approaches in favor of a class based and economic deterministic model. Nonetheless, new structural inequalities fit into neither materialist nor post-materialist models of explanation. Rather, they have transcended both the politics of class and of identity-differentiations.

On the side of resisting (dissident) knowledge, the emergence of multidimensional global justice movements in the late 1990s and the recent rise of Post-Global Financial Crisis, anti-austerity movements and anti-globalist protests in Europe, shows us the importance of material redistribution and citizenship rights and the continuity of material issues in recent struggles (c.f. Martin 2001; Burgmann 2003; Hosseini 2006). The homogenizing forces of neoliberalist economic globalization question the disunity and the total heterogeneity of social interests, although these homogeneities are different from the homogenizing forces of pre-welfare-state industrial capitalism. Even so, social theorists need to be aware that the resurrection of material interests does not require them to return to the traditional approaches in analyzing social knowledge. It is no longer necessary to deal with the materialist issues exclusively through class based explanations, and it is not necessary to reduce the cognitive dimensions to post-materialist cultural values. Even in the philosophy of historical praxis, the stress on class relations and structural inequalities is not an axiom, but merely a research hypothesis whose validity must be corroborated by empirical research.

The implication of these events for a politicized social theory of ideation is to synthesize a restructured historical structuralism (a subjective materialism) with the constructionist emphasis on culture and human agency in the core of theory, while retaining all axes of theorizing the politics of identity and difference, i.e. gender, class, race, ethnicity, etc. (see, for instance, Williams 1999). Again, similar to the 1960s turn in both the realm of theory and political practice, contemporary processes of social change (so-called globalization, from above and from below) have implied significant requirements for modifying at least both the sociology of knowledge and the social physiology of cognition. While accepting that these requirements are the subject of controversial arguments and explorations at both levels of activism and sociological knowledge, the basic suggestion of this section, as a contribution at the level of social inquiry, is that there are greater historical and theoretical prospects than ever for developing synthetic approaches towards overwhelming current dichotomies—i.e. social determinism vs. constructionism, infra-structuralism vs. super-structuralism, materialism vs. post-materialism, identity differentiation vs. normative consensus. One may call this potential turn the ‘post-cultural turn’ in social theories of cognition.

Theories of social ideation before the 1990s can easily be grouped in opposing dichotomies like micro and macro. The 1960s turn in the history of each perspective is a turning point from the dominance of the realist-determinist paradigm towards the prevailing subjectivist-constructionist orientations that facilitated the reconciliation between social sciences and humanities. Since the mid 1990s, it is hardly possible to categorize studies in terms of these orientations (see Hosseini 2003, for a more extensive review of these theoretical transformations). Sociological theories have moved towards making deeper integration and stronger syntheses, at least in terms of some ontological and epistemological presumptions (Markova 1996; Bauer and Gaskell 2008; Lizardo 2004, 2009). An appeal to take integrative approaches does not necessarily require unifying existing theories and overwhelming diversity. Rather,
current ontological and epistemological disputes, which have fragmented the complexity of social reality (or detotalized), would be replaced by a diversity of interpretations and theory-practice nexuses (axiological assumptions); a diversity which has been less acknowledged, and therefore less discussed, in the meta-theoretical debates, due to over emphasis on the fragmented dimensions of social phenomena and the residual positivist myth of value-free science.

Towards ‘Social Ideation Studies’ as a Comprehensive Approach

In this last section, based on the recent conciliatory trends briefly reviewed above, I attempt to outline an emerging area of study with some ambitious developments under the title of ‘social ideation studies’ (SIS), premised on the core concept of ‘social ideation.’

As I mentioned, attempts to extend theoretical endeavors in social cognition towards more integrative conceptualizations have usually failed. These attempts often try to establish a link between macro-structures and social agents. However, social ideation is still understood in contrast to social structures (see DiMaggio 1997; Shilling 1999; Morgan and Schwalbe 1990). These are, however, one-dimensional extensions of one position towards another, rather than attempts to independently find a common ground as a focal point for amalgamating the moderated forms of mainstream perspectives. The notion of ‘cognition’ needs to be extended to all levels of analysis. Even social agents have to draw on the habitual forms of thinking and socially shared knowledge in order to produce new forms of meaning and sentiment.

Any synthesis between the realist versions of cognition theories like the social cognition approach and the subjectivist versions like the phenomenological or philosophical theories of consciousness (e.g. social representations theories) would be incomplete without dissolving the imposed contradictions between everyday-life knowledge and formal knowledge; a contradiction biased on the side of formal knowledge in social cognition theories and on the side of everyday knowledge in the latter area. However, it is important to notify that developing and applying such a feasible, analytical synthesis must be strongly grounded in a coherent set of meta-theoretical assumptions that significantly resolve the linkage problems between the different levels of analysis – such as micro and macro, agency and structure, and objective and subjective.

Theorizing the links between social ideations and social structures is not sufficient. One needs to acknowledge the autonomous ontological status of ideation as a social reality and as the end of study. ‘Social ideation’ in this article is a concept developed based on this goal. On the other hand, ‘social ideation’ is not simply meant to be a substitute for ‘knowledge’ which is mostly treated as an institutionalized and formal form of ideas at the macro level of analysis. Actually, in using this new term, I hold continuities among all levels of analysis. Therefore, social ideations cover all forms of ‘inter-subjective,’ ‘communicative,’ ‘trans-subjective,’ and ‘collective’ relations. Defining social ideation is based on the recognition of an existential base that is not limited to mental processes or even the intersubjectivity of everyday-life interactions.

‘Social reality’ consists of not only resources, behaviors, functions or even framed expressions and discursive expressions, but also an ideational construction that is undergoing changes. A social class is not only a crowd of people with common and economic interests. A class is born when these interests are constructed socially and collectively as a part of an
identity, but again, this does not mean that this construction is independent of social and economic determinants available in the historical context. Therefore, class-consciousness cannot be totally shaped in a deliberative way.

When these ideational constructions of social realities come to be seen as deliberative practices, speculations, reasoning and justifications, social ideation emerges as a social reality. Many social factors determine this process. Based on these presumptions, the ontological bases of social ideation as a concept are grounded in social mechanisms that mediate between social structures, social agencies, and ideations. The SIS is concerned with the way in which the cognitive constructions of social realities are translated into conscious-level (in the form of ideas, beliefs, discourses, and so on) by social agents (at every level from individuals to societal) and with the social factors conditioning this translation. New social groups (and networks) transform older social ideations in ways that bring them into line with their own divergent logical, ontological, and normative background assumptions. However, this process is partially conditioned by the predominant codes of cognizing the social world. Therefore, social ideation studies are concerned with both the conjunctional-contingent causalities and the socially constructed nature of these modes of social knowledge. Ideations are intersubjectively constructed and socially determined and, at the same time, are causally determining social realities.

Social ideations are not restricted to information acquisition and information processing (as an output of learning), but include insights, sentiments and imaginations about the social world, self and social life. They are not only mediums through which we understand our social world and communicate our meanings and sentiments, but also aspects of both our daily experiences and the social systems. They too are realities of their own somewhere in-between the life-world and the system (Smith 1997). Social ideation includes not only science but also con + science. The SIS attempts to study how social agents conceptualize and ideate their social and material environment. The basic presumption here is that every social agent is an ideating social actor. The practical goal of social ideation is to not only simplify the reality through frames and schemas but also challenge, maintain or change the social relations in which social actors are involved. Although there are sources that produce and reproduce ideas and images, social ideation is not condensed in one part of society but it flows throughout the community insofar as it affects the perceptions and affections of people.

Underlying 'social ideations' are fundamental and axiomatic assumptions about the social world (ontological assumptions), the ways of crediting explanations and understanding social events (epistemological assumptions), the morality and rightfulness of events, as well as a specific conjunction between facts and values (axiological assumptions) and the practicality of conceptions in terms of intentions and experiences (pragmatic assumptions). Although these assumptions are not explicit, especially at the level of everyday life expressions and indications, they may underlie the framed and formulated ideas (such as personal attitudes, beliefs, and explanations) as much as the more articulated levels of knowledge, ideology, and discourse. The SIS realizes these assumptions in order to categorize ideal-typically constructed modes of social ideations by considering the impact of intellectual and social contexts. Besides, rejecting the residual positivist idea of strict (social) 'scientific/non-scientific' distinction or the neutrality of social sciences (Lacey 1997), the SIS extends its main domain towards exploring the interrelated and mediating processes between these two levels of social ideation.
By ‘social ideation,’ I refer to the procedural nature of cognition that is defined in an extensive and comprehensive meaning with respect to the level of analysis. Besides, I lay stress on the type of ideation that is related to the processes of understanding and emotionalizing social life by social subjects. Hence, ‘units of research’ in the SIS are those modes of ideation which must be explored through analyzing the meaningful and emotional connotations embedded in practices and discourses. For example, a special way of thinking about national security disseminated by a government outlines a social ideation that is based on a constellation of a special worldview, way of explanation, reasoning, morality, emotionality and justificative logic, as well as broader political-economic purposes. A group of NGOs, activists and intellectuals may separately challenge this way of conceptualizing security by implicitly questioning its ideological and practical bases. As far as one can recognize coherent assumptions and characteristics among their discourses, one may claim the emergence of a competing mode of social ideation that is playing an historical role beyond (but rooted in) the scattered personal or group attitudes. Explaining the emergence and transformations of both opposing social ideations depends on accounting for the internal-external and cognitive-social factors.

Social ideations are dynamic practices that are procedurally under constant reconstruction and deconstruction, and ontologization and habitualization by different social subjects. They simultaneously determine the capability of all affected social agents to cognize and emotionalize their own social world. Social ideation originates in the conscious reactions of social agents while encountering social structures and social events. Social matters including social relations become objects of cognition and subjects of argument, normatively and/or analytically, rationally and/or irrationally, systematically and/or non-systematically, affirmatively and/or critically. When social ideations become institutionalized or habitualized, they will appear as the fundamental constituents of social structures that condition ongoing perceptions or they may become subjects of critical challenges.

The reproduction of social ideations is solely dependent neither on the social interactions at the everyday life level nor on the institutionalized sources of power like class, the state, political forces and so on. For example, political or ideological discourses carry a conception of power which is rooted in the everyday-life levels of power relations like the relations between sexes or authoritarian relations in families. On the other hand, explaining the micro-authoritarian relations and attitudes would be defective without exploring the institutionalized ideological modes of thinking.

The SIS is not only interested in exploring the relations between social ideations and power, but is also concerned with the power of explanations and emotionalizations; what finally changes the social is neither the ‘transitive’ dimension of knowledge/reality nor the ‘intransitive’ dimension, but rather the disparity between the two. Progressive ideational transformations result from critical reflections on these disparities. Therefore, in comparison to critical discourse studies, the SIS intends to realize how power relations are being (re/de)constructed through cognitive-emotional structures of discourses, in addition to the linguistic structures.

While social cognition theory examines how people think about themselves and the social world and how cognitive aspects of individuals’ ideation are conditioned by social structures, the SIS, extending the existence of ideation beyond individuals’ mental activities, examines how what has been thought, judged, or interpreted about social issues at any level (micro-meso-macro) has been shaped by social agents at that level, while being affected by socio-historical structures and other social agents at the other levels. The SIS aims at examining
how the deliberative reflection of social actors on their own entity and on their social-environmental world translates into all forms of social ideation.

Social ideation is a multilayered phenomenon extending from implicit, non-reflexive layers to explicit, reflexive levels. The translations and motions of ideas across these layers require a synthetic approach. Accordingly, we may acknowledge three main layers of ‘social ideation’: (1) the cognitive-emotional layer, i.e. the processes of reflection and impression out of which comes new modes of explaining, emotionalizing, and conceptualizing social issues as well as (de/re-)constructing the conventional ways of ideating social issues; (2) the structural layer, i.e. the stocks of established/institutionalized forms or modes of conceptualizing the changing social environment that are conveyed less self-reflexively or undeliberately; and (3) the agential-practical layer: i.e. those aspects of ideations that correspond to practical incentives, intentions, experiences and collective behaviours of social actors.

The distinctive engagement of social ideation studies with the complexity and multidimensionality of human cognition contradicts exclusive commitment to any special method of social research. Rather, it provides not only justification to employ interdisciplinary methodologies but also a strong metatheoretical basis to rationalize the selection of methods and the final configuration of study.

The SIS, itself, is a social ideation. Hence, denying the fact-value distinction, it is not only concerned with explaining social ideations (as the objects of research) but also interested in reflexively examining its own outputs. Therefore, deliberatively unmasking its own values and domain assumptions through academic and non-academic open dialogue is the essential methodological principle for providing reliability.

The SIS is intended to balance ‘practice’ and ‘structure’ by theoretically recognizing a relatively autonomous role for social ideation as the third dimension. It is also grounded in the assumption that ideations are not reducible to either everyday life processes of meaning construction or organization processes of ideology/knowledge construction. In the following sub-section, I attempt to define this approach by discussing the underlying assumptions rooted in a critical-realist perspective.

**Principles of SIS**

As argued before, what I refer to as ‘social ideation studies’ is grounded in the acknowledgement of dialectical relations between the three major components of a social phenomenon, i.e. the historical-structural, the ideational (cognitive-emotional), and the practical-agential. This can be translated into a methodological approach by synthesizing a reflexive version of interpretive orientations with a modest version of structuralist methodology. Such a demand can find its basic justification among critical realist debates (see Morrow and Brown 1994; Hosseini 2010).

Morrow and Brown (1994: xiv, 24-5, 160-2) argue that the methodological foundations of critical realism, in order to be more applicable as a research program with empirical dimensions, must be rearticulated in an integrative approach in which both subjective and objective dimensions of reality are treated appropriately. They label this methodological approach “interpretive structuralism,” or “hermeneutic structuralism.” The central ontological assumptions of the approach are described as follows (1994: 24):
• “social relations … always have an interpretive … dimension”;
• “meaning and language … are the bases of forms of reality construction that both reveal and conceal the experiences of subjects”;
• “structures may be species-specific or historically constituted and sometimes consciously transformed even if they have a kind of objective facticity that appears independent of immediate actions”;
• “social and cultural structures constrain human action as does a grammar language, hence not in the way implied by variables as determinants”;
• “meaning and structures are reproduced (statically) and produced (dynamically) across space and time.”

Here, I add another principle to stress the relative autonomous or essential position of human cognition in relation to practice and structure:

• Social subjects, albeit in different degrees, take up ‘distance’ – in their social conducts – from both their surrounding conditions and their own actions. They can do this by means of their reflexive, deliberative contemplations and strategic actions-decisions, as well as cognitive-emotional stands (see Mouzelis 2000).

It is precisely because of the last principle that we need to give an analytically autonomous position to ‘social ideation’ in relation to agency and structure. This autonomy is more eminent in social movements and scholarly communities because the reflective distantiation between actors and their surrounding structures is higher. However, this reflective distantiation is not always complete and explicit in everyday life activities. It always needs to rely on shared habitual forms of thinking and cognitive-emotional residuals.

The SIS as an Analytical Framework

Based on the above assumptions, the irreducibility of all the three dimensions of social phenomena needs to be acknowledged in our analyses. According to the SIS principles, social realities have three interrelated but analytically irreducible components: ‘practical-agential,’ ‘contextual-structural,’ and ‘discursive-cognitive.’

There are four interrelated ‘hypothetical’ mechanisms (M1-M4) that mediate between these three dimensions (see Figure 1); these are the mechanisms that translate interactions, social practices and experiences of social conditions into ideations and vice versa. Mechanisms in general can be roughly defined as sets of entities and activities organized to produce a regular series of changes from a beginning state to an ending one. A social mechanism in particular is thought as a complex of interactions among social actors conditioned by their social conditions and statuses that underlie and account for aggregate social regularities. Social factor/variable X is the cause of social factor/variable Y if, and only if, there is a social mechanism from X to Y. However, the notion of social mechanism that I propose here is more general and qualitative; social mechanisms are recurrent social processes or events that mediate between an initial change in a given aspect of social life and its outcomes for other aspects (for a more comprehensive explanation of social mechanisms, c.f. Hosseini 2010a, Chapter 3). These four mechanisms are as follows:
M1. Experienced (E’) social structures and conditions (S’) by the social actors can influence their ideations (I) (e.g. living in a marginalized community or experiencing relative deprivation may cause some actors to become more inclined towards adopting and/or developing radical ideas and identities); M1=(E’⇒S’⇒I)

M2. Conditioned (S) by social structures, collective experiences and practices (E) influence social ideations (I) (for instance, not everybody who lives in a marginalized community would develop a radicalized identity. However, socially marginalized individuals who have had the opportunity to be in contact with – or become aware of – some activist groups with radicalized views/identities are more likely to share or sympathize with such ideas); M2=(S⇒E⇒I)

M3. Institutionalized ideations and sentiments (I’) may condition (S) social practices and experiences (E/E’) (e.g. ideologies as forms of institutionalized political ideas and discourse may influence the type of collective actions practiced by a group of activists. For instance, the critical ideas about inequality developed in some ideologies may provide activists with the necessary means to frame their claims and mobilize public support (E) for their causes or change their relationship with some institutions (E’) like the government or big banks); M3=(I’⇒S⇒E’)

M4. Translated into practices and actions (E), ideations (I) influence structural changes (S’) (e.g. believing in non-violence actions can be translated into peaceful protests in order to influence policies and change the laws); M4=(I’⇒E⇒S’)

Figure 1: Social mechanisms mediating social ideations, social practices and structures; the social conditions (S’) that are experienced (E’) can be different to the structural circumstances (S) that practically condition/influence actors’ experiences of their own agency (E). Ideation can be less institutionalized (I) or more institutionalized in the form of ideologies or beliefs (I’).
Inspired by Peirce’s (1931-58) reformulation of Aristotelian causation theory in the social sciences, the SIS can create a bridge between critical theorist causation analyses of social ideations as definitive realities and the so-called non-causal (individuating) humanities accounts (see discussions by Pratten 2009 and Short 2007 about the capacity of Peirce’s theory). Therefore, the ‘social ideation studies’ can be planned as a framework to study social ideations, by ‘explaining’ cognitive transformations through four ‘interrelated’ components of a comprehensive causal analysis:

C1. The ‘individuating-internal’ component: exploring and examining the reasonings, judgments, authentications, emotionalizations, (de-)moralizations, and the axiomatic assumptions underpinning the forms and modes of ideation among the members of a given social entity.

C2. The ‘individuating-external’ component: studying the effects of other modes of cognition on the content of a given mode of social ideation. For instance, ideas influence each other in their transactions and historically generate one another (history of ideations’ genesis). On the other hand, when one studies social ideation at any particular spatial-temporal level, one needs to understand the interrelations of this level with other levels.

C3. The ‘defining-internal’ component: studying the role of social actors, their shared social situations, political cultures, and identities in shaping and producing ideations and ideas; examining the extent to which people organize their social activities and relations in harmony with their shared feelings, purposes, desires, and understandings.

C4. The ‘defining-external’ component: studying the conjunctions between socio-historical events and status with the social ideations; discovering the situations that favor special types of ideation; as an example, socially exclusive environments may select some specific modes of identity construction required to achieve their submissive ends.

Considering the above outlined framework, we can now define three core assignments for the SIS when we aim to examine and explain the formation and transformation of ideations:

1. Ideal-typically mapping and tracing back the historical genesis of specific modes of ideation within a field of study in terms of the very basic orientations towards defining social conditions and bringing about social change by relevant agents (this corresponds to the first and second components of our causal analysis, C1 and C2). Depending on the aims of the study, social subjects’ ideational outputs (in any social mental form) can be thematically analyzed and compared in terms of their underlying practical, ethical, emotional, or logical assumptions. For instance, in the areas of social movement studies, this can be done through accentuating the movement’s basic ideational features that may challenge the predominant discourses of the system, in terms of their ideological principles, and may contest with other modes in the field for developing alternatives. Critical and morphological approaches to discourse and frame analysis can be employed to map the ideational structure of the movements (see van Dijk 2006; Starr 2000; Freeden 1998; and Hosseini 2006, as some exemplars).
2. Explaining how social ideation processes and their associated modes of cognition are pragmatically constructed due to the social actors’ experiences of their collective actions in realizing their subjectivity and common purposes, while being conditioned by social structures (C3). This assignment is a moderate form of methodology utilized by constructionism that focuses on M2.

3. Explaining how the emergence of a mode of ideation or ideational process is socially conditioned by structural complexities while being ‘constructed’ through the actors’ intersubjective experiences of their social and environmental conditions (C4). This assignment is a moderate form of methodology applied by structuralism that focuses on M1.

Social ideations are not only conditioned by social structures and practically constituted through social interactions, but also construct and mediate the relationship between structures and the actions of subjects. The SIS rejects the notion of universal patterns of causation in social life. Rather, it retrieves the structuralist alternative to explanation and its emphasis on generative ‘social mechanism’ that can be referred as quasi-causal. Therefore, explaining the emergence and the demise of social ideations requires investigation of the quasi-causal impacts of both practical and structural contexts of social changes in a circular way that, in turn, requires analysis of the ‘ideational compound’ of both contexts, especially through the lenses of related social actors.

Frames, rhetoric, narratives, discourses, intellectual products and activities, repertoires and so on are not only the bearers of ideas and the constitutive elements of social actions, but are also the reflections of and contributors to structural changes. Thus, these are not treated in the SIS just as a means to answer ‘how questions’ about the ideational dimension of social interactions, but can also be analyzed as a means to better answering the ‘why questions’ about the historical contexts of social changes.

Answering one question cannot be complete without regard to the other question. For instance, the ‘how question’, mainly focused on by constructionism, relates to the constitutive role of collective-networked framing (or claim making) in constructing the political action out of changing and conditioning social structures, like political opportunities. Frames are the means articulated by social agents to facilitate interactions and therefore to achieve ends (see Payne 2001). Therefore, the best channel towards understanding social actions, for constructionism, is to analyze these framing processes. However, explaining these cognitive mechanisms requires an understanding of the ‘conditioning’ structural factors and contingent structural complexities out of which actions and framing processes come to exist.

I lay stress on the process of ‘social conditioning’ as an answer to this general question: “How do structures influence agents”? Generically, there has been an emerging consensus among the post-1960s sociologists of knowledge to replace the concept of social structures as ‘social determinants’ with the more modest but still imprecise concept of structures as ‘social conditioners’ (see McCarthy 1996; Archer 2003).

The conditioning influence of structures upon social agents is mediated by the reflective-emotional abilities of the social agents. To become causal powers, structural properties/opportunities must be experienced and conceptualized by social subjects in their fields of interaction. In turn, this process of experience-conceptualization is constrained and enabled by the objective reality of structural opportunities and properties. Therefore, social subjects in the same context respond to structural changes in different ways; and this is why, typically,
just a few of these responses can thrive and be sustained longer than others are. The necessity of distinguishing between the existence of structural properties as objective entities and their causal powers as experienced by social agents requires critical-comparative reflection in relation to both the understanding of structural factors as the objects of our independent intellectual/scholarly curiosities, and the understandings of structural factors by social subjects. The former requires the theorizing of social structures in a critical manner and the latter requires the objectification of social ideation.

**Conclusion**

In this article, I briefly discussed that the complexity of ‘social ideation’ has been overlooked by different disciplines and perspectives including recent integrative/conciliatory endeavors. Developing integrative approaches and interdisciplinary methodologies needs to be well founded in terms of the fundamental assumptions and concepts employed. Otherwise, the outcome is likely to be a mechanical transplantation.

The synthesizing framework I have proposed in this article could be a primary step, parallel to other recent integrative approaches, towards realization of the above requirement. The SIS has the capacity to be adopted and adapted according to the objectives of any social inquiry, as a comprehensive approach aimed at grasping the ideation by humans of their social and material environment that avoids reductionism. However, as mentioned earlier, developing such a comprehensive approach must also be grounded in a coherent set of meta-theoretical assumptions that justify the dialectical relations between the three dimensions of social reality. Otherwise, these efforts may result in “theoretical tinkering” or what Buechler refers to as “conceptual poaching.” As he points out, “Whereas genuine theoretical synthesis implies moving beyond preexisting paradigms to create something new, conceptual poaching means appropriating the language and issues of a different paradigm and incorporating them as a minor theme in a preexisting paradigm that undergoes no fundamental change in the process” (Buechler 2000: 53-4).

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