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Theory Psychology 2007; 17; 5

DOI: 10.1177/0959354307073149

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Playing by the Rules

Social Representations of 'Law' as the Socio-cognitive Mediating Mechanism between Law and Society

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ABSTRACT. The research reported here attempts to reveal the complex relationships between 'law' and social behavior. The assumption is that social representations are the socio-cognitive mechanism that creates social behavior; thus, revealing the social representation of 'law' can give us an explanation of social behavior as it is related to law. The social representation of law among members of the divided Israeli society is very complex. It simultaneously embodies obedience to and violation of the law, freedom and limitations, negative experiences, and criticism of the law, together with an understanding of its importance. The social representations of the law among our interviewees permits them to experience a feeling of autonomy, while keeping behavior within normative limits to uphold the law. Interviewees were also found to believe that the law is the strongest instrument available to ensure that society is protected and the status quo preserved. The law is seen as the defender of democracy, the weapon for coping with unstable security and the guardian against social and political chaos. By revealing the complex construct of the social representations of 'law', we reveal the mechanism that controls the social behavior related to 'law', including obedience or disobedience and the social logic for these behaviors.

KEY WORDS: Israeli society, law, obedience, social representations, socio-cognitive mechanism for social control

Introduction

The research reported here attempts to reveal the complex relationship between 'law' and social behavior, on the assumption that social representations are the socio-cognitive mechanism that creates social behavior and that revealing the social representation of 'law' can provide an explanation of social behavior around law.

Even the strongest institution of law with the strongest cohesive system cannot enforce obedience from all people all the time. George Orwell tried this hypothetical exercise in his famous book *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. He managed to show us through literary manipulation that total obedience cannot be guaranteed even when a cohesive totalitarian system takes over historical facts and creates new ones to suit its purposes—one that operates mechanisms of de-socialization and re-socialization with very penetrating surveillance.

In modern democratic societies there are no such mechanisms. There is freedom of knowledge and freedom of action, but still most citizens obey most laws, even when they are not observed or controlled and even when they can be sure that disobedience will not bring sanctions.

The first and the most common approach to law was the deterrence paradigm (Simpson, 2002). But as Simpson shows, there is not enough empirical evidence to support this paradigm, nor has it strong logical or philosophical grounds. The law is governmental social control; it is the state's most direct intervention in the normative life of its citizens. However, as Erickson (1993) reminds us, 'the law is a powerful but also blunt instrument of social control' (p. 1155).

Researchers in the social psychology of law tend to explain obedience to and disobedience of the law by a variety of variables, such as results (what did one gain or lose?). Such approaches often present a dichotomy of good and bad. They tend to presume rational actors who, instead of obeying or disobeying the law for its own sake, treat the law as an obstacle or an instrument, not as a value (Cooter, 1998; Landes & Posner, 1993). This claim is a bit simplistic and is unable to explain highly complex situations. The social complexity that law regulates increases with the growth of the population and the development of technologies, technical knowledge and variety of production. The sheer volume of laws, their complexity and interconnections, and their constantly changing nature, make law an incomprehensible system, even for experts (Hirst, 2000). The connection between knowing the law and obeying it is thus not very strong. In fact, in many cases, especially among big corporations, knowing the law increases their ability to manipulate legal definitions in such a way that their activities are not officially defined as illegal. That makes even the notion of 'obedience' a rather unclear concept.

Other approaches try to explain obedience through variables of process judgment in relation to norms, perceived fairness (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Wenzel, 2004), legitimacy of legal systems as a consequence of experience and mastery (Tyler, 1990; Tyler, Boeckman, Smith, & Huo, 1997), as a product of socialization (Tapp & Kohlberg, 1977), and as linked to other, different, personal and social variables. The classic research of Asch (1952) and Milgram (1974) made it evident that obedience is a socially dependent phenomenon, and many researchers have emphasized the power and importance of norms and social mechanisms in explaining obedient behavior (Coffee,

2001; Cooter, 1998, 2000; Frey & Feld, 2002; Hirst, 2000; Jacobsen, 1979; Keizer, 1978; Simpson, 2002; Tyler & Blader, 2000; Wendel, 2004; Wenzel, 2004; to mention only a few). However, norms and the process of acquiring norms are not so simple. A norm is an obligation, dealing with what people ought to do (Wright, 1963), and members of society acquire them during the long process of socialization. But the more common use of the term 'norm' is as 'average behavior': what people actually tend to do. When we deal with obedience to law, what people actually do is no less important than the social obligation of what they ought to do. But what is the mechanism that combines all these threads: the social obligation, actual social behavior and the resulting obedient (or otherwise) behavior related to law?

One of the answers is *social control*. Many researches have been using this theory of social control to show connections between what they call components of 'social control' and crime prevention or obedient behavior. However, beyond the intuitive notion of this concept, it appears to be very vague and is used in different ways by different writers—everything from social agencies, such as health services, scientists, police or customs officials (Erickson, 1993); to family integration, school, peers and leisure behavior (Junger-Tas, 1992; Oxford, Harachi, Catalono, & Abbott, 2001); to behavior emerging from bases of social power, such as coercion, legitimacy of equity, reciprocity and responsibility (Raven, 1999). This leaves us without much of a theory and, according to some research, not much empirical evidence either (Chunn & Gavigan, 1988; Greenberg, 1999; Hirst, 2000).

I want to stay with the concept of 'society', because there is more to law than the question of obedience and because I perceive law as a complex social phenomenon that influences society but is also influenced by it.

Most sociologists have seen law as part of the social entity, which cannot be separated from it. The founders of modern sociology, Durkheim (1947),¹ Marx (1968; Marx & Engels, 1976)² and Weber (1962, 1974)³ all saw law as connected to the social structure in one way or another, emerging from it as well as being its creator. The same is true for a long list of sociologists, such as Blau (1971), Dahrendorf (1971), Giddens (1984), Luhmann (1985), Munch (1987), Parsons (1937), and others no less important.

Despite the vast amount of research substantiating the claim about the existence of such connections, it is much more difficult to show the exact mechanism of how it happens. The mechanism of social representations can shed some light on this question.

Social Representations

We can describe social representations as the spectacles that our cultural and societal groups make us wear from our very moment of birth (and some say even before that)—spectacles that shape the world for us, give phenomena

their names and their value, tell us which phenomena are connected to other phenomena and in what way, how we are to behave or to feel in certain circumstances, and what it all means.

Social representations tie the cognition of individuals to their culture and group identity (Farr, 1998). Since these representations are present in the area that includes individual cognition and the identity of social groups, they permit assimilation and accommodation of social and behavioral concepts into the individual's cognition, where they are anchored in the earlier concepts and orientations that characterize that individual (Doise, 1993; Moscovici, 1988; Wagner, 1998).

The claim is that an individual is not independent in his or her perception of the world and understanding of reality. Social, cultural and group processes interfere with the individual's process of structuring perception and reality to a degree that allows us to speak of social representations as a group quality, even though they are part of individual cognition (Doise, 1993; Tajfel, 1981; Turner, 1984).

We are referring neither to a system of knowledge that explains behavior logically nor to a linear, rational system of explanation or of cause and effect. Social representations do not explicate behavior; behavior is a part of social representation (Ben-Asher, Wagner, & Orr, 2006; Levin-Rozalis, 2000; Levin-Rozalis, Bar-on, & Hartaf, 2003; Wagner, 1993, 1995, 1998). The idea that there must be a correlation between knowledge and behavior, or that behavior is rational, is in itself part of a Western social representation of rationality (or of appropriate behavior). It demonstrates the Western concept of the meaning of knowledge and its accepted bond with behavior.

In fact, internal consistency does not usually exist within the various dimensions of social representations. It is a mistake to view social representations as uniform within a group. We find non-consensual attitudes, various degrees of agreement and personal emphases. We may find that the internal structure of a representation includes discrepancies and contradictions; representations themselves may not be exactly coherent (Ben-Asher, 2000; Billig, 1993; Duvéen & Lloyd, 1990; Jodelet, 1991). But we can assume that some social representations will tend to be more homogeneous than others. More than that, the level of homogeneity of a social representation may serve as a tool for distinguishing one group from another.

Social representations are not attitudes. In order to have an attitude about something, we must have a social representation of that thing (Moscovici & Marková, 1998), and even then, the attitude is only the more approved and acknowledged part of the social representation. Social representations are not explanations of behavior (Wagner, 1993, 1995, 1998); rather, they are multi-dimensional interconnections between the individual's conscious and unconscious, rational and non-rational conceptions, and those of the relevant group and the way this group and its members function in the world (Levin-Rozalis, 2000).

It is this complex and multi-faceted whole, which is different from the sum of its parts, that makes social representation such a rich and interesting analytical tool.

In this article I want to show the explanatory power of social representations, and to use them to answer questions about the relationship between society and law.

Researchers in the field of social representations have found differences in central values (anchors) and group relations that influence the process of objectifying different concepts, such as 'human rights' (Mana, 2000; Spini & Doise, 1998). Those who have examined the relationship between social representations and law have found differences between societies (Hayashi, 1994) on the readiness of individuals to obey the law, along with a strong influence from perceptions of fairness, the legitimacy of law and distributive justice, among other things (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 1990; Tyler et al., 1997).

The law, per se, is not my concern here, but rather its relationships with related concepts, their representations and their cohesive power to shape and explain social behavior.

The role of social representations in this context is to make objects, events and people adjust to society's conventions by placing them in a known tangible context. Social representations impose themselves on cognitive, emotional and physical activities and dictate to the individuals within a group what is right and proper to think, feel and do (Herzlich, 1973; Moscovici, 1984). Social representations permeate the process of social discourse by way of two mechanisms: objectification and anchoring. *Objectification* is the process of changing abstract or unfamiliar ideas into concrete, perceptible and tangible concepts (Doise, Clemence, & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1993; Moscovici, 1961/1976). *Anchors* are the connection points between existing social representations and new ones; they function as filters through which new information is added. Both Doise (1993) and Moscovici (1984, 1993) distinguish between the level of the individual and the group and claim that each individual will always operate through his/her special filter (Wagner, 1995). In this article, I want to explore the anchors through which or to whom the social representation of law is connected.

This process of anchoring and objectification creates an organized field of representations, which is the way groups of people define, describe and construct scientific and institutional concepts such as law (Herzlich, 1973). In this process of anchoring, objectifying and organizing the field of representations, there is always both conflict and cooperation: while the representations are anchored in existing constructs, these constructs are changed by the process of objectification to create the field of representations typical of a specific group (Levin-Rozalis, Bar-on, & Hartaf, 2003; Moscovici & Marková, 1998).

The group chosen for this study is a very diverse one—the new middle class in Israeli society.

Israeli Society

The question becomes even more salient when we speak of Israeli society. Israeli society is a society of immigrants who came from 'the outside' (which includes most of the world) or are children of immigrants. What we have is a variegated jumble of cultural concepts, values, attitudes and norms, which mutually influence or are influenced by one another (Ben-Raphael, 1982; Sagy, Orr, & Bar-on, 1999; Shafir, 1996; Weiss, 2005). Since we are speaking of a new society that has existed for a relatively short time, all these cultures and traditions have not yet crystallized into something clear and coherent. Israel has a society with very little common tradition of clearly defined social, cultural or political norms (Peri, 1997).

The complexity of the situation increases if we consider the political situation. Israel is defined as a Jewish state despite the fact that some 20 percent of its citizens are not Jews. If we include the inhabitants of the territories of Judah, Samaria and Gaza, the proportion of non-Jews is more than 40 percent. A third of the inhabitants (the Palestinian Arabs who live in the territories) are not citizens, nor do they want to be, and they see the Israelis as occupiers (Al-Haj, 2002; Arian, Talmud, & Herman, 1988; Bar-Tal, 2001; Barzilai, 1996).

There are many factors creating a deeply riven society. The dichotomy of Jewish–Arab relations is one rift. The deep split between religiously observant and secular Jews (which is exacerbated by the problem of the status of religion in a state defined as a Jewish state) is a second rift. The mass immigration after the declaration of independence created another two rifts: between veterans and newcomers (which is an ongoing division) and between the ethnic identities of those who came from Arab and North African countries and those from European countries (and here again there is a difference between those who came from the former Soviet Union and those who arrived from Western Europe). The ethnic rift is deepened by the fourth rift, which is that between economic classes (and which tends to be related to ethnic identity). The fifth is the ideological rift between right and left, which is very strong in Israel, especially on issues concerning the Israeli–Palestinian dispute (Aviv, 1990; Ben-Porat, 1989, 1993; Horowitz & Lissak, 1989).

We can claim that in any society people disagree in good faith about rights, justice and moral obligations but must nevertheless find a way to live together in a stable, ordered way (Wendel, 2004), but this is not so clear in a society as divergent as Israel—a society in which some members express lower levels of commitment to legal obedience (Rattner, Yagil, & Pedhazur, 2001; Yagil & Rattner, 2002; Yuchtman-Ya'ar, 2002) and even reject the authority of the Supreme Court.

Interviews

The tool used in this research was an in-depth, open interview. The 75 interviewees were asked to speak about 'the law'. During the open conversation,

they were encouraged indirectly by the interviewers to relate to associated concepts, to talk about their experiences with 'the law' and their feelings about it, as well as their behavior in the context of this institution.

The open interview is a useful tool for revealing social representations. If it is sufficiently open and long, the interview allows subjects to present their social representations in their own language and in the contexts that appear proper to them.

The interview was started with a free-association question: What is the first thing that occurs to you when hearing the word 'law'? From this point, the interviewees were asked to continue and say whatever they wanted concerning 'law'.

Social representations can only be explained in context and in relation to other social representations. They are part of the political, economic and religious context of society (Emiliani & Molinari, 1992; Guimelli, 1993; Moscovici, 1993; Mugny & Carugati, 1989). Hence, I paid special attention in the analysis to such topics as the origins of law, its connections with morality, justice, authority, and its universality. These topics were chosen following the literature, which reveals their connections to the law (Cohen, 1972; Friedman, 1975; Podgorecki, 1974; Rozen-Zvi, 1993; Tyler, 1990). I also paid special attention to anchors that related to Israeli society, such as democracy and the security of the state.

The interviews were analyzed through content analysis. A hermeneutic reading of the interviews took place in order to reveal the maximum aspects and layers (Gadamer, 1976). The first stage was an internal analysis of each interview to find the central themes and ideas that arose. The second stage was looking for themes that repeat across interviews and those that do not. Then the data were used to construct the complex social representations of 'the law'.

The sample consisted of 75 adults who were selected according to several criteria derived from the definition of 'middle class': at least a high school education, a professional occupation and residence in a 'respectable' but not too rich neighborhood. The sample was selected according to the 'snowball' system (Patton, 1990) and thus the distributions were determined *ex post facto*. The attributes of interviewees covered a broad range of ages (from 22 to 67), occupations and levels of education (high school to Ph.D.), and the whole political range.

The Post Factum Significance of the Sample

I checked the type of neighborhood in which interviewees grew up, compared to where they lived at the time they were interviewed. The change in place of residence was striking. Whereas the distribution of childhood places of residence runs the entire gamut (established *moshav*,⁴ new *moshav*,⁵ development town,⁶ inner-city neighborhood,⁷ *kibbutz* or abroad), there appears to have

been a wholesale move to Tel Aviv among our interviewees, with some remaining in other prestige areas. These findings are consistent with the definition of the new middle class. While the bourgeois middle class of the industrial society has been the stronghold of conservatism and has reconstructed itself by preserving its class norms and values, in contrast, the new middle class that has emerged during the last few decades contains individuals whose mobility is due to their education, their flexibility in the labor market and their earning ability. These individuals come from different positions in society and are not identified with specific social groups (Ehrenreich & Ehrenreich, 1979; Gouldner, 1979; Kahl & Gilbert, 1987; Routh, 1987; Shikler, 1999; Szymanski, 1983).

Support for the claim that we are dealing with the new middle class lies in the fact that an attempt to find sub-groups for comparison in the sample was fruitless. I tried to characterize groups in two ways: first, by using background factors such as age, sex, type of profession, place of residence and social or political attitudes as an independent variable and the contents or type of response as the dependent variable; second, by taking the content or the characteristics of responses (low-frequency responses or high-frequency responses) as the independent variable and the background factors as the dependent variable. I did not find any clustering, either by the characteristics of the sample or by the content or characteristics of the responses.

This is important because it is not conventional to anticipate common social representations in such a group, and yet I hope to show that they exist and that the very nature of this fluid group strengthens my claims about the explanatory power of the concept of social representations for obedient behavior.

The Social Representation of 'Law'

The study reported here examined social representations of law as a possible socio-cognitive mechanism for connecting law and society. It examined two parts of this question. The first asked whether there is a substantial presence of common social representations of 'law' in a group that can be described as part of the new middle class in Israel, and if so, what is its structure? What is the organization of the field of representations? The second part is how the social representations of law serve as a socio-cognitive mediator between law and society and what explanatory power is folded into the content of these social representations. Does it give us a deeper understanding of the connections between law and society? Can we say that the social representations of law serve as some kind of mechanism to connect this faceless notion of 'society' to the actual perceptions and behaviors of people? The answer to this is very interesting. In the coming paragraphs, I will reveal the components of the social representation of law and illustrate its explanatory power.

The answer to the first question is affirmative. We can characterize a common construct of 'law', which is grounded as spontaneous knowledge in the language, in the ways of relating to law, and in the declared daily life of the study group. When examining the interviews, one can see that the subjects that appear are quite similar, and the customary perceptions of law were given by a high percentage of the interviewees (in most cases, more than 80 percent). The behavior reported by the interviewees, the feelings (mostly negative), the images the interviewees used, the language, the conceptions, are all very similar despite differences in age, place of residence, political views, occupation and level of religious observance.

The fact that there is a similarity in responses is not, in itself, highly significant. It is, however, the necessary condition of this causal explanation (Copi & Burgess-Jackson, 1996). But if we want to examine the explanatory power of the social representation of law, or of any social representation, for that matter, we have to examine the content of these representations because the content is the sufficient condition: only the content of social representation can give us a causal explanation for a social phenomenon. When we deal with social representations, we cannot separate the actual contents from the analytical mechanism. Social representations influence groups and societies through and by means of their contents, the contents created by ongoing social discourse and activity, and influences this discourse and activity in a continual process. We can say that the content of specific social representations is an inseparable part of the mechanism.

I will now present the content of the social representation of law and the structure of its field to see what it comprises and to examine interconnections between its parts; then I will try to show how these act as a socio-cognitive mediator between law and society.

I want to begin with a description of the content of the social representation of law, starting with its general components (its origins and its relationship with morality, justice and its universality) and going on to its situational components (its connections with democracy and state security, its connections with personal images, experiences and feelings, and the simultaneous influence of all this on actual [declared] behavior). To be more precise, I want to examine the ways in which the actual (declared) behavior solves tensions and contradictions between all the other dimensions of the social representation of law and makes it a comprehensive representation that includes all this complexity within itself.

In Figure 1, I have attempted to illustrate the relations I am about to present.

If we want to summarize the core of the field of representations of law that I am about to present and to describe its characteristics, we can say that law is perceived as a tangible and concrete entity that is a social product that leans on societal morality and justice but is not identified with them. Its main role is to regulate social life, and, hence, society is its main customer. In the Israeli

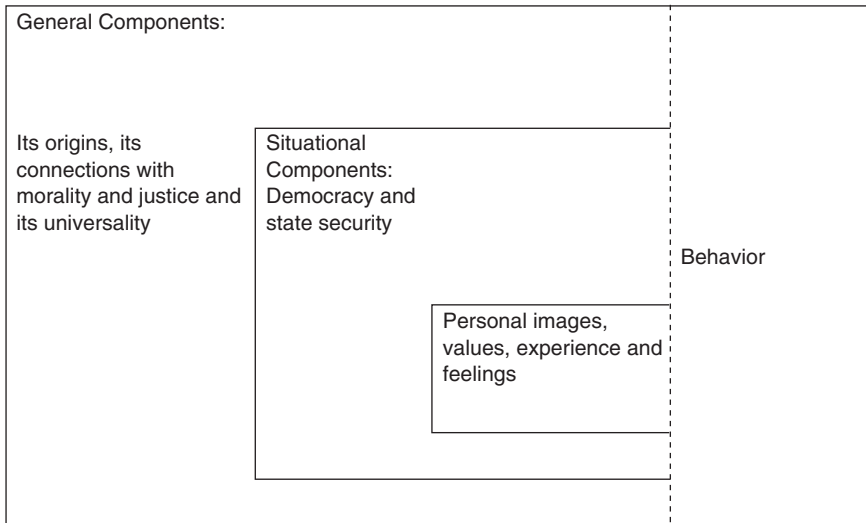


FIGURE 1. Relationship between the different levels of components of the social representation of law.

situation, when state security threatens democracy, the law is the guardian against chaos.

I want to elaborate on this, using quotations from the interviews (*in italics*) as illustrations.

General Components of the Social Representation of Law: Its Origins, Its Connections with Morality and Justice and Its Universality

The law doesn't stand up against the standards of most of the interviewees. It is a social and not a personal tool. Despite the law emerging, representing and supporting morality and justice, it has a lot of problematic angles. It is not always just, not always moral and is not really universal.

The law is a social property.

Almost without exception, the law is perceived to be a social property. Even those few interviewees who answered from an individual point of view spoke of the individual in a social context (relations between the citizen and state or the human-social experience).

Most interviewees viewed society as the main beneficiary of law: *The law is a social convention defining what is permitted, accepted and forbidden, and it has formal backing.* More than 86 percent of the respondents held this idea in one form or another. The great majority (more than 70 percent) of their

answers depicted the whole social structure either as the creator of law or as being protected by it: *The law is a shared fantasy of the nation's desire for order and security.*

There are strong connections between law and morality and between law and justice.

While no respondent argued that law and morality are the same, most saw some relationship between them; however, their ideas of the nature of this connection were different. Only one interviewee said, in general terms, that one cannot exist without the other.

Almost two-thirds of our interviewees claimed that the law is a sort of guardian of morality and its function is to enforce the moral code. *The law enforces values—and that is the connection to morality*, said one of our interviewees. Another one elaborated: *The law is meant to protect morality—the law ‘Thou shalt not steal’, for example. Not everyone thinks that it is immoral to steal so the law is intended to defend morality.*

Others had different opinions. Eleven percent saw law as inferior to morality in that morality is absolute, broader than the law, or that the law is general—it affects all members of a society under the same law:

The law is a process of political compromise. Personal morality is less open to influence. The political compromise is indirect, and its influence can be exerted through the media and public opinion. You are supposed to be convinced by this influence, but the law has no need for you to be convinced.

Others claimed that obeying the law is a moral characteristic or that morality is subjective—it is dependent on the situation, the person and the case.

As to justice, the majority of the interviewees (70.7 percent) saw a connection between law and justice and believed that justice is the source of law. Almost 30 percent claimed the opposite. Four percent argued that there is no connection between law and justice; 25.3 percent felt that justice is subjective and law is not, and that the law is general and universal, while the rules of justice depend on the person or the group involved.

The law doesn't measure up to the standard of universality.

One of the important standards that is not met is universality. Eighty-one percent of the interviewees unambiguously (and spontaneously) claimed that everyone must be equal before the law—that the law must operate according to universal criteria. No one claimed the opposite. However, opinions differed as to whether this is actually the case. More than 85 percent of our interviewees claimed that those with power are ‘more equal’:

Someone who has more money can exploit the law for his benefit. He can hire a better lawyer. He has the means to manipulate the situation, can influence doctors, for example, and in general, he starts from a stronger position and the law is more flexible for him.

Some others claimed that the law is essentially biased:

Arabs are less equal than Jews. Women are less equal than men. Children are less equal than adults. The poor are less equal than the rich. Even the laws discriminate; moral values discriminate; the authorities discriminate; even the judges who have the same social values and the same view of justice discriminate.

The law is not as universal as it is supposed to be; it very much represents the relations of power within society.

Situational Components of Social Representations of Law: Democracy and State Security

Despite its problems, the law has an important role in preserving democracy and in dealing with the problematic situation of state security.

The connections between democracy and the law are imperative.

Most of the respondents saw a connection between law and democracy. While there was a range of perceptions about this connection, almost all answers (94.4 percent) indicated a connection. The majority of interviewees (79.1 percent) felt that the law is essential to the existence of democracy. Some were more general, saying that: *Democracy would not exist without the law.* Others saw more specific connections, such as: *A democratic government operates by laws and is run according to laws. Or: Law is possible without democracy, but democracy is not possible without laws.*

Eleven percent of the answers indicated a direct connection between the nature of society and the nature of law: *Without democracy there is no assurance that the laws will be universal or moral.*

The connection between state security and the law has the potential to guard society from chaos.

State security, which might be a marginal issue in most Western countries, is crucial in Israeli life and a central topic of discourse. Israel has been in a constant state of alert throughout its history. And, indeed, 71.9 percent of the interviewees think that its security situation is frightening, worrisome and bad.

State security is viewed as directly connected to the law. Very few of the interviewees (3.8 percent) denied this connection. However, where there are considerations of security, the law is more powerful than justice and morality. Fewer than 10 percent of the interviewees believed that security is influenced by justice. Most of the interviewees believed that the only way to protect morality and justice in this complicated situation is through the law, which stems from morality and justice. The latter are, by themselves, not strong enough to cope (even partially) with such difficult problems as state security.

More than 70 percent of the responses claimed that the law is stronger than security, that it places restrictions on security and defines the means of dealing with security issues. Some of the interviewees mentioned the danger in this, saying that:

Since in our country we are forced to pay strict attention to the security of the state, the law can be used to attack human rights and conceal information from the public in the name of security. This can lead to a blurring of facts and disinformation in the name of security, and to the creation of a personal system of justice by all sorts of 'hush-hush' undercover men who are liable to operate contrary to law and morality.

Others saw connections through legal procedures that regulate the situation: *There are laws that protect the security of the state, like compulsory military service, or laws that deal with situations of emergency that are activated when the security of the state is threatened.*

It is essential for security systems to rely upon law and justice for their own sake not only for the sake of society:

The security system tends to protect itself, and to justify this by a legal, just and moral base. A security system that is not based on these three things will encounter problems in establishing itself. And: I think that if people take the law into their own hands, security becomes lax.

But the opposite opinion also exists. About 17 percent of the answers claimed that when there is no security, the status of the law becomes uncertain: *If we don't have minimal security, everything we have, including the law, is undermined.*

The Personal Components of the Social Representation of Law: Images, Values, Experience and Feelings

The territory of social representations is between individuals and the groups and society to which they belong. The processes of objectification and anchoring of law to the group social representation, which I will deal with later, begin with the dimension closest to the individual (i.e. his/her images, experiences, values and feelings).

The metaphor of 'law' connects it to reality.

We asked first for a metaphor of law and looked at these metaphors from several angles. We checked them on the axis **tangible–amorphous**, and more than 60 percent of the answers were tangible. Then we looked on the axis **concrete–symbolic**. Seventy percent of the answers were concrete: *policeman, judge* and *the book of laws* were the most popular answers (which are both concrete and tangible). The law, for most our interviewees, is not an abstract concept. It is connected to concrete and tangible reality, even if only peripherally.

The social norms and values, as declared by our respondents, do not include obeying the law.

Is obedience to the law self-evident? Among our group of subjects, it was by no means obvious that one must obey the law. In fact, there are definite norms for disobeying the law; furthermore, our respondents saw themselves as possessing a high degree of freedom. They declared, almost unanimously, that they contravened the law and perceived the law as being subject to their own judgment. Only 17 percent of the interviewees declared that the law must be obeyed absolutely and at all times: *One must always obey the law. If one lives in a society, one must abide by its laws.*

The main reason given for not obeying was the potential of law to contradict principles, morals or conscience. In those cases, the law should not be obeyed, as can be seen in the following examples claiming that justice and morality are superior to law:

One should obey when the law is clearly just. If the law is clearly unjust, I will find a way to get out of obeying it.

When a law is immoral or conflicts with justice, it should not be obeyed.

We have a situation of moral law, and moral law is a matter of judgment—for example, a military law about behavior towards civilians. This is a case of morality, and I will decide if it fits in with my personal moral criteria. I will judge whether or not to obey the law.

Fifty-eight percent of the subjects felt that personal moral values are superior to law:

Of course one must generally obey the law, but it is preferable that personal moral norms be a code that is above the law.

A person must have a moral code that is above the law and he/she must always judge the law—is it moral or not?—and if it isn't, it should be disobeyed.

Other reasons for not obeying were individual conceptions and values of freedom of choice: *No one with a modicum of individual judgment blindly obeys the laws.*

It appears that personal values are more important than obedience to the law. In the question of what one ought to do, the answer is to use judgment, not to obey automatically, and to put morals before obedience. There is nothing in the law that demands obedience; indeed, there are laws that invite infringement. Reasoned judgment plays a dominant role, and principles and values are important.

Dealing with the law is almost never a pleasant experience.

The emotional level is congruent with the rational one. Not only is the law unjust and not universal, it also usually hurts you when you deal with it. The respondents' personal experiences with the law tended to be unpleasant. Fear,

insult and strong feelings of injustice were the dominant feelings aroused. Only about 11 percent of the answers presented positive feelings, such as: *I felt good when I was involved with the law because I was on the right side.* All the other answers described a different mind-set. About 40 percent shared the following view:

I felt that there is great difficulty in carrying out the law, enforcing it, and administering it.

I felt that the law is impotent, that there is a huge gap between what the letter of the law is and what is actually carried out. It is hard to enforce the law and it didn't really protect me.

Others experienced feelings of anxiety and fear or feelings of impotence and lack of any chance of winning:

The involvement frightened me, highlighted the limits of an affair, that it was no joke.

There were three instances in which I felt I was right and I appealed and lost. I felt that I didn't have a chance even if I was right according to the law.

As we can see, the law doesn't serve the individual as it should and it is very difficult to deal with. In the eyes of the interviewees, the law is perceived as remote and unapproachable. It is seen as a specifically social artifact without any interest in the individual. In fact, individuals come off worse from their contact with the law. It is so impersonal that a professional intermediary is needed to deal with it. Only three interviewees claimed that they would not seek advice when dealing with the law.

Behavior, Anchoring and Objectification of Law

Within the theory of social representation behavior, being part of the representation is a social solution to the complexity of people's perceptions, feelings and behavior as members of a specific society within a certain situation. As a complex mechanism, social representations reflect for us the complexity of the relations between these components. But this is not enough. The objective here is to use social representation as an explanatory mechanism that connects a specific abstract concept (the law) to behavior. To do this, we have to examine the ways in which 'law' becomes a set of social representations that includes all of the above *and* behavior as an inseparable part of it. We have to examine the processes of objectification and anchoring.

The process of objectification deals with the transferring of an abstract, new or unknown concept or phenomenon into a known and tangible phenomenon. Through its shared social representations, an abstract or new idea or knowledge provides a construction of the social reality in accordance with the collective's aims and its social relationships with other sectors of the society (Breakwell, 1993, 2001; Doise, 1993; Moscovici, 1976, 1988).

I believe we can clearly see the results of the objectification process. The law has its own life among our group of interviewees, either as an abstract regulator or as a codex of rules, which in its very essence is incomprehensible to lay people—and even to experts. Most of their metaphors are similar—they are tangible and concrete. Our interviewees have a similar understanding of the law's characteristics, and they relate to it with similar language, declared behavior and feelings. What is important here is not whether this objectification is 'true'. Truth has nothing to do with it. What is important is the fact that what has been created is a common notion and conception of law, which are the perceptions not of an individual but of a group.

Here it is important to make a distinction between verbalization and conceptualization (which certainly exist, if only in the media) and the creation of a social representation embodying far more than mere concepts. This distinction must acknowledge a cognitive representation of behavior and feelings, the feelings themselves, naming and comprehending behavior at different levels of understanding (cognitive and emotional), as well as values and morals. And most important, this cognitive representation must be part of a discourse. In other words, it is imperative that the representation can be addressed cognitively with a common deep understanding of its complex meaning among this group.

Objectification begins at the personal level of the anchoring process, the process that combines new ideas or knowledge to existing representations, and presents itself through differences in emphasis. For example, 83 percent of the interviewees expressed negative feelings toward the law, but within this general negative feeling there are different facets: anger, a sense of injustice, fear, helplessness.

What is important here, in my opinion, is not so much the actual feelings as the fact that the feelings are negative. It means that in the depth of the social messages, bad feelings towards the law are not excluded from the variety of possible and even legitimate behaviors: social representations define the boundaries of a phenomenon, what is *in* (that which is seen and part of the discourse, even the non-legitimate discourse) and what is *out* and excluded ('off the radar screen', things that are unseen or not done). In a very religious society, for example, bad feelings toward God will be excluded. Some decades ago, a family where the parents were the same gender would not be seen as a 'family' (even if it had been possible to find one).

The bad feelings our interviewees freely expressed toward the law also tell us that there is something inherent in institutionalized law that contradicts the interviewees' basic feelings. And again, this is a group reaction, even though drawn from personal interviews. It is a social reality that goes beyond the individual. The same is true of all the topics that arose in the interviews.

This illustrates the tension typical of the process of objectification. The anchors that organize the field of social representations, such as its universality, morality or justice, enable objectification of the law, but in a unique way that is dictated by the anchors present. The interviewees claimed, for example,

that the values of morality and justice, even though more important than law, do not go hand-in-hand with the law: the law is not always moral and not always just—it is not universal but tends to serve those in power. In other words, we can claim that the interviewees see the law as representing the actual social situation in which they live, representing the structure of power when they talk about universality, the ambiguous relationship with justice and morality that they face and the faint hope that these latter are still protected by the law.

In that sense, the social representations of law mirror the social situation. The criticism and the social and political debate about questions of morality and justice that are highly evident in Israeli society, the fact that this society lives in a situation in which there are not always clear-cut answers to actual questions of morality or justice, where justice for one is often unjust for another, and the moral dilemmas that are always in the air and part of the social discourse, all of this explains the fact that both morality and justice are perceived as relative and context-dependent and as weak in the sense that they cannot serve as guides for action and cannot be enforced or made to serve as an enforcement mechanism. They are always in need of support from the law in order to maintain some sort of existence. This all creates feelings of helplessness among the members of that society.

The same is true for the second group of anchors arising from the Israeli context: democracy and state security. The connections between law and democracy and state security are much clearer and stronger than the relationship of law with morality or justice. The majority of interviewees recognized these connections and believed that without law, democracy would not exist.

The spontaneous anchors that were raised are salient. These anchors, which have contributed to the unique formation of these social representations, are typical of the new middle class in regard to the relative perceptions of values. They also connect obedience or disobedience to concrete situations and contexts and the belief that one has the freedom to decide how to behave. Obedience to the law, as the interviewees perceived it, is a matter of consideration: principles are more important than the law. There is nothing in the nature of the law that obliges obedience, but there are very good reasons for disobedience in the content of law.

Consistent with that, the declarations concerning behavior are along the same lines. Obedience to the law is a matter of consideration, and most interviewees consciously and even scornfully disobeyed it. Eighty-seven percent of our interviewees purposely chose to violate a law. Most of the violations (73.4 percent) were perpetrated because of a certain disdain for the law. The justification was that they did not think that the law they disobeyed was important, that they didn't cause any harm, that the law was too restrictive, or they were simply negligent. A considerable number of violations (39.1 percent) were intentional, perpetrated because it was worthwhile, to save money, or because they enjoyed violating the law. About 5 percent of the violations were carried

out on principle, as a kind of 'in-your-face' challenge. Only about a fourth of the violations were felt as being motivated by factors external to the respondents: ignorance of the law or situations where there was no choice.

The most popular violation was disobedience to traffic laws (72.1 percent). Trailing behind in second place was non-payment of license fees, taxes or fines (27.9 percent). We can define these violations as 'normative violations' in the sense that most people not only commit them but openly admit to having done so. This shows that this kind of disobedience to the law is not perceived as something to be concealed or to be ashamed of. Still, the examples people gave of instances where one ought not to obey (and the reasons for actually not obeying) are different and, in most cases, don't explain the action. There is no connection between disobeying traffic laws and moral personal codes, or decisions about the law being just or moral.

Here again we can see the clear connections and reflections of the social representations of societal structures and characteristics and the solutions they provide. The values and norms of our group of interviewees that are congruent with those of the new middle class are relativistic and based on freedom of choice. They also state the superiority of personal values over obedient behavior.

The interviewees maintain a delicate balance in order to preserve the law.

So, if our interviewees viewed obedience to the law as subject to their judgment, if they claim that the law had failed at exactly those points that are seen as good reasons for disobedience (it discriminates, it is not moral or just and its connections with morality and justice are not clear), if contact with the law requires an intermediary and is accompanied by unpleasant feelings of humiliation and fear, then disobeying the law is not something to hide. And this behavior is quite widespread.

Why, then, does the legal system not collapse? It does not collapse because the interviewees were careful not to diminish the power of the law and to maintain a delicate balance. There appears to be an active orientation that prevents the law from collapsing. People infringe the law, but not too much, and they keep to socially accepted limits: they all disobey it in the same manner. So the opposite is also true: most of them obey other laws or, if disobeying them, do so quietly and secretly. The interviewees declared that they had a degree of freedom within which they permitted themselves to violate certain laws, but this has boundaries and limitations. Disobedience is limited. Freedom also has limits.

Furthermore, the question arises whether the interviewees would involve the law if it were necessary. Would they voluntarily turn to a system that they see as being so problematic? The distribution of the answers to this question is extremely interesting: 96 percent said 'yes' and only 4 percent answered 'no'.

The law, then, is seen as a social institution and as an institution for solving certain problems. It is stronger than any bad experience or negative attitude.

The majority of people will not hesitate to renew their ties with it, irrespective of how unpleasant, unjust or inefficient those ties may be. This is confirmed if we compare the responses of the interviewees with their reaction to a violation of morality or justice (which the interviewees see as above the law). Only 17 percent of them would, by their own testimony, react if they encountered an offense against morality, and only 10 percent would react to an injustice.

Why? The answer apparently lies in those areas where the law is important in the eyes of the interviewees. They saw the law as originating from and serving society. It is not just and often not moral, but it is a result of both justice and morality and preserves them both.

How does law serve or not serve society? What are the connections between law and the context in which it operates?

If we analyze the field of social representations of law presented by our interviewees, we can see that the answer lies in those areas where the law is important according to these social representations: the only way to protect morality and justice in the Israeli situation is indirectly, with the help of the law—the law that stems from morality and justice and which has sufficient power to cope with problems that morality and justice are unable to deal with. So, although it may be that the law is not important in itself, morality and justice are, and the law is needed to preserve them.

The interviewees are convinced that the law is the strongest tool that exists to preserve society, to preserve life as it is. The law is perceived as the most effective and powerful defense of democracy, enabling it to cope with the difficult problems of state security and to prevent chaos.

Democracy is important to the interviewees, and it is interesting to note that the percentage that would react to a hypothetical undemocratic practice is similar to the percentage that would react to an infringement of the law: 92.5 percent. Twelve and a half percent would react on a local level through discussions and explanations, the same percentage would leave the country, and all the rest (67.5 percent) would react overtly and publicly by demonstrations, publications or organizations.

Social Representations of ‘Law’ as a Mediating Mechanism between Law and Behavior

The theory of social representations assumes that social representations are both personal and social at the same time. They are the individual’s construction of reality when communicating with other members of a society within a specific social context. This kind of social construction, however, is also a collective event, since it occurs in a systematic chain of constructions in a specific social system. Social representations are the collective products of such encounters, onto which further interpersonal collective constructions are anchored (Moscovici, 1984, 1988; Wagner, 1998). That is the theory. But can

social representations be perceived as a socio-cognitive mediator between an external, even if societal, entity such as law and the behavior of individuals that is connected to this entity? Have social representations the power to explain obedience and disobedience, general attitudes towards law and the behaviors related to it? The first step is to examine whether we can, indeed, talk about a joint or collective action.

I believe that the answer to this question is 'yes'. We have seen that the individuals in our study were preoccupied with indecision about the law. They described a personal conflict between their relativistic and individualistic values and the notion of law as something that ought to be obeyed. In addition, the nature of law did not measure up to their standards and evoked unpleasant feelings in them.

As individuals in the process of the interviews, they were subjectively free to choose whatever position suited them; they were free to say whatever they chose or to remain silent. As individual members of society, they were free to violate the law or not. However, it looks as if the participants took roles in a pre-determined setting. I claim that, even though the interviewees acted in a 'private' situation (i.e., a personal interview), this process can only be adequately captured at the group level.

Ben-Asher et al. (2006) examined a period of crisis in three Israeli *kibbutzim* regarding a dispute that had the potential to change a traditional way of life. They show in their research how the procedures of public debate that allowed spontaneous expression of opposing points while maintaining a neutral environment that helped avoid friction created a situation that avoided harsh social friction when the members of the *kibbutzim* were assembled, but, at the same time, maintained the social expression of opposing attitudes across encounters. The merit of this kind of communication is that, although social friction is avoided, social development is not. A group is able to discuss traditional as well as new perspectives and yet maintain its identity and integrity. The writers call this phenomenon 'thinking society' (Ben-Asher et al., 2006).

The principles of the situation I've described here are similar. The interviewees found (separately, as individuals) a solution in behavior that they all exhibited, behavior that enabled them to vent their frustrations and anger by a pseudo 'disobedience' to the law while, at the same time, preserving its power to keep society from coming apart.

Can the social representations of this group be perceived as a socio-cognitive mediator between 'law' and the actual behavior of the individual as a social act? In my opinion, the answer is 'yes'. Being a complex construct, a social representation has the power to reveal and explain the complexities involved when we want to understand the connections between society and law, where obedience or disobedience is a consideration. Social representations, by their very nature, comprise all three actors in this multi-faceted system: society, individuals within society, and the law as a societal product to which both individuals and society have obligations. The social representations of law reflect the whole

complexity of society: the structure of power, the problematic situation that affects values and threatens social existence, the uniqueness of the group with its special values, the delicate balance between group values and the demands of law, the mechanisms that preserve law and the reasons for this preservation.

Beyond the explanatory power of social representations, they have another important role and this is the socio-cognitive mechanism that creates social acts. Law in itself doesn't have the power to control society. Research dealing with law and obedience (as shown in the introduction to this paper) is always looking for mediators between the written law and human behavior—different components of what is called *social control*, *norms*, *values*, and so on. The problem with all these mediators is that they are partial, and even if they are proven to have an influence on behavior, they are always only one-dimensional.

In contrast, social representations as a mechanism lie on the seam between individuals and society, affecting most dimensions of an individual's behavior, values, feelings and understanding of reality. Being created by 'the unceasing babble' of human interaction, discourse and action, social representations combine the acts of many individuals into an interconnected social act, an act that is influenced by and a product of the discourse in society. For, as Moscovici (1985) says, 'All "cognition," all "motivation" and all "behavior" only exist and have repercussions insofar as they signify something, and signifying implies, by definition, at least two people sharing a common language, common values and common memories' (p. 91).

But do we really need social representations for this explanation? What is unique about social representations that does not exist in discourse analysis, semiotic or conversation analysis. Don't all of them explain more or less the same thing?

Semiotics is the theory of signs and looks at the relationships between knowledge and signs (Pierce, 1965; Wexler, 1987). Dealing with broad meanings for *signifier* (which can be a word, a gesture, a drawing, a dance, etc.) and *signified* in social communication, it seems, on the face of it, similar to social representations. The main difference (among other things) is the importance in semiotics of signs and their role in communication and the creation of knowledge (Schonmann, 2001). In that sense, semiotics is partial to social representations, dealing with signs while we deal with social representations, which have to be considered as part of a complex that includes attitudes, perceptions and conceptions, feelings and emotions, behavior, norms and values, and so on.

The same is true for discourse analysis, which is a term used in a variety of ways. In its broadest definition, we can talk about 'language-in-use' or the study of actually occurring language (text) in a specific communicative context. This is common (in different ways) to 'conversation analysis', 'rhetoric', 'ethnomethodology' and 'poststructuralism' (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Potter, 1996; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Schwandt, 2001; Van Maanen, 1990).

According to discourse theory, communicative action is a verbal activity and should be analyzed according to lexical rules. It is distinct in that representations

may take the form of lexical rules, thematic contents and behavioral prescriptions (Ben-Asher et al., 2006).

Clearly, the theoretical perspective of social representations does not rule out findings based on discourse, semiotic or rhetoric theories. What I want to assert is that each theory sheds light on distinctive phenomena. By looking at social representations as cognitive-emotional-behavioral units found across public and private situations between individuals communicating within specific contexts and societies, we have been able to spot and illustrate these phenomena, expanding our understanding of how a society thinks (Ben-Asher et al., 2006).

To see whether it is possible to 'provide an explanation of social behavior around law', I had to examine the concrete contents of my interviewees' social representation, in the context of the current situation of Israeli society (in which they live) and to see if these contents can explain the behavior of the new middle class in relation to law.

By defining the meaning of reality and the way to deal with it, social representations of law direct the behavior of any individual in the relevant social group. Obedience and disobedience are not an individual act but rather a social act directed by the group's social representations. By revealing the complex construct of these representations, we reveal the mechanism that controls obedience or disobedience, and the social logic behind these behaviors.

Notes

1. Durkheim (1947) talked about social facts that are the product of human interactions but, once emerged, they control human life through coercion and sanction. The law as social fact is the concrete representation of social solidarity, which is abstract and intangible.
2. For Marx (1968; Marx & Engels, 1976), the law serves the continuity of social power relations as part of the ruling ideology and the superstructure.
3. Max Weber (1962, 1974) believed that modern state administration embodies instrumental rationality, defined as the pursuit of explicit ends through efficient means. The law depends on historical and economic processes, on the one hand, and the product of rational thought, on the other. Rational thought, according to Weber, is in itself dependent on the social context.
4. A smallholders' rural settlement founded before 1948 by veteran residents in Israel.
5. Established by the government in the early 1950s, these were settled by new immigrants. They are mostly located along the periphery of the country.
6. Small towns in the periphery that were settled by new immigrants.
7. Inner-city neighborhoods are mostly poor areas, while prestige neighborhoods are well-to-do.

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