The Discursive Frames of Political Psychology

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The Discursive Frames of Political Psychology

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The aim of this article is to apply elements of contemporary social theory to the major theoretical, methodological, and ideological divisions across political psychology and to consider both the origins and the impact of a range of theories and models. In so doing, we clarify some of the complexity surrounding the discursive and cultural origins of political psychology. On the basis of this analysis, we aim to overcome the redundant binarities and dualisms—both conceptual and geo-spatial—that have characterized the field up to now. These binary pairs relate to matters of epistemology, ideology, and methodology, and we show how each pair has been the basis of claims made regarding continental differences. As we shall see, such black-and-white thinking limits our capacity to understand the nature and potential of political psychology. Instead we wish to encourage a greater degree of universalism and globalism that is appropriate to political psychology as it evolves into a broader global discipline. We argue that political psychology as a field must attempt to deal with the consequences of an increasingly borderless world in which political identities are becoming more fluid, increasingly hybridized, and open to transformation.

KEY WORDS: political psychology, epistemology, ideology, methodology, space, security, identity, borders, Europe, the United States

Introduction

Every decade or so, the still emerging field of political psychology takes stock of its progress and assesses its achievements, current contributions, and future development (Hermann, 1986; Knutson, 1973; Monroe, 2002; Sears, Huddy, & Jervis, 2003; Stone, 1981). Since its earliest beginnings as an academic concentration in the 1970s, political psychologists have also found it heuristically useful to construct spatial maps of the field and, in particular, to trace the origins, development, and impact of the field across different countries (Feldman, 1990; Lamare & Milburn, 1990; Nesbitt-Larking, 2004; Shumao, 1996) and regions (Bryder, 1986; Kinnvall, 2005; Montero, 1986; Pye, 1986). The work that we undertake here builds upon the rich insights of these scholars and yet hopes to develop a more global and integrated conceptualization of the field by reviewing approaches to political psychology through the lens of contemporary social theories (Billig, 2008; Calhoun, 1994; Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982; Foucault, 1971, 1980; Giddens, 1984; Lyotard, 1984). Preexisting analyses grounded in late-modern conceptualizations of space and territory are decreasingly relevant and increasingly limiting as we develop political psychology in a globalizing and networking world. Our broad purpose here is to apply elements of contemporary social theory to the major theoretical,
methodological, and ideological divisions across political psychology and to consider both the origins and the impact of a range of theories and models. In so doing, we begin to clarify some of the complexity surrounding the discursive and cultural origins of political psychology. On the basis of this analysis, we aim to overcome the redundant binaries and dualisms—both conceptual and geo-spatial—that have characterized the field up to now, and to encourage a greater degree of universalism and globalism that is appropriate to political psychology as it evolves into a broader global discipline (Reicher, 2008). Our central contention is that as the forces and relations of the political world undergo transformation, so the very objects of our disciplinary attention require new ways of seeing. Our contribution here is to incorporate insights from a range of theoretical perspectives that sensitize us to the new experiential realities of a globalizing world. Our initiative is intended to contribute to the theoretical, methodological, and practical challenges encountered by those, like us, who seek to internationalize the field of political psychology.

We have adopted the concept of discursive frame in order to undertake our analyses below. Our understanding of discourse derives broadly from Foucault (1971, 1980; see also Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982). A discourse is an organized body of knowledge and understanding that is generated from historically situated regulations and practices. Discourses construct the object of knowledge in such a way that only certain interpretations and modes of reasoning are possible. While agents construct discourses through their social practices, discourses also speak through us, through our human agency, and thereby privilege and shape certain ways of apprehending the world. While certain discourses may be hegemonic, they do not remain uncontested. A discursive frame is a deeply structured and partial (in both senses) symbolic apparatus that we use to make sense of the world (Mumby & Clair, 1997; Wuthnow, 1989). According to Mumby and Clair (1997), it “provides the fundamental categories in which thinking can take place. It establishes the limits of discussion and defines the range of problems that can be addressed” (p. 202). While our analyses are informed by a Foucauldian orientation toward power/knowledge and subjectivity, this article is not intended to be a thoroughgoing genealogical exploration of the kind undertaken by Parker (1996), Rose (1999), or Yates and Hiles (2010).

To identify discursive frames is to recognize the propensity for understanding to be cast in terms of what the postmodernists call “binaries” and what Giddens (1984) refers to as “dualisms.” These terms refer to the tendency to organize the world of knowledge into pairs of absolute opposites. Certain discursive frames privilege and promote singular terms in a binary opposition. In recognizing and analyzing such binaries that organize dominant bodies of knowledge, we are thereby equipped to problematize, contest, and overcome them. Among the more prominent binaries to have emerged in political psychology is that between Europe and North America (Brewster Smith, 1983; Bryder, 1986; van Ginneken, 1988; Jacoby, 1975; Jay, 1973; Katzen Nelson, 1997; Kinnvall, 2005; Monroe, 2005; Parker, 1989; van Strien, 1997; Zeitlin, 2001). While such a distinction is of historical and cultural relevance, its continued presence as a binary distinction obscures understanding of the nature of the subfield. Arguments adduced on either side of the continental divide have often led to the defeat of intellectual straw men. Where one is—one’s place—conditions what one is predisposed to see and how one sees it. As van Ginneken (1988) says: “. . . social theories and social practices never come out of the blue, but are always linked in some way to a wider context” (p. 4). Wagner (1989) rightly claims that social scientific output is the resultant of specific intellectual traditions and political structures combining in the forum of scientific institutions (p. 510). Discursive frames across the various centers of research in political psychology have of course been situated: that is, grounded in the knowledge, values, and phenomenologies of the various times and places in which political psychology has arisen.

Political psychology has also been a problem-centered field. No matter where we search for its origins, it has arisen from those social problems and puzzles that emerge throughout history and in specific locales. Van Ginneken (1988) says that political psychology is about the need to control, to
regulate, and to understand (p. 6), a claim that might be made of any scientific endeavor. Throughout history, there have been compelling historical events that have conditioned entire research agendas. There are a number of empirical concerns that remain specific to the European context, just as there are issues that are mostly limited to North America. In the field of political psychology, questions of race, ethnicity, and racism have arisen in the context of distinctive histories and structures and have given rise to different sets of issues. Bryder (1986) suggests a contrast between Europe and North America: “In Western Europe, as contrasted with later developments in the United States, the relationship between political psychology and its variegated social environments has always been close and transparent” (p. 436). Bryder has a point about comparative transparency, and we elaborate on this later. On the basis of closeness, we disagree. Both American and European political psychologies have always been close to their sociohistorical environments. From the perspective of his intellectual formation in the United States of the 1960s and 1970s, Sears (1993) rightly states: “. . . political psychology has been very much stimulated by urgent political problems of the day, especially those with actually or potentially devastating human consequences, whether maniacs in high office, the rise of totalitarianism, anti-Semitism, the radical right, the Cold War, Arab-Israeli Conflict, the specter of nuclear war, or the transitional problems in postcolonial nations” (p. 12).

In order to “clear away underbrush” (Greenstein, 1969), we identify three binary pairs that have been invoked to explain the dominant tensions between the discourses of political psychology. These binary pairs relate to matters of epistemology, ideology, and methodology. Those who lay claim to the causes and consequences of distinction in the subfield often have these binary terms in mind, and each pair has been the basis of claims made regarding continental differences. As we shall see, such black-and-white thinking limits our capacity to understand the nature and potential of political psychology. In epistemology, the binary terms are positivism and constructionism/constructivism. Ideologically, the principal distinction has been between liberal individualism and communitarianism/collectivism of the right and the left. Methodologically, the distinctions have been drawn between largely quantitative empiricism and the thick descriptive/verstehende approaches. We explore each of these binary terms in the three subsequent sections of the article below. The final section of the article, “Beyond the Discursive Frames,” brings together insights derived from our analyses and offers a range of suggestions as to how political psychology might progress in the future. We acknowledge that our own analysis is itself grounded in a discursive frame, even if we hope that it is both open and self-reflexive. We do not make the case for a reinvention of the subfield. Rather, we advocate building upon the broad range of discursive traditions, historical experiences, structural and cultural realities, theoretical and methodological insights. Through knowing them deeply and in their complexity, we can call upon them as needed and open ourselves at the same time to further traditions, perspectives, and discursive frames. This, we believe, is the minimal requirement for a genuinely internationalized political psychology, one that leaves behind the continental divide and ventures into a more global orientation.

**Epistemology**

Those who refer to distinctions between research traditions in political psychology may not articulate precisely what it is that they have in mind, but at the root of the principal distinctions of enquiry are those of epistemology. In political psychology, there are two major contenders: positivism and constructionism/interpretivism. Positivist social science emerges in the work of Comte and Durkheim as a set of rationalist and technical tools found in the natural sciences and designed to reveal the evolutionary laws that explain the phenomena we are observing, either through empirical observation (positivist empiricism) or through deductive logic (logical positivism). As van Ginneken (1988) says with reference to the European context: “. . . the fourfold capitalist, industrial, urban, and democratic revolution was gradually shattering the bonds of traditional society, holding out the
image of a free man making his own choices as a consumer and as a citizen. This made it imperative to analyze his natural inclinations and predict his behaviour in more accurate ways than before” (p. 4). The legacy of these traditions can be found in modified positivism in which Comte’s emphasis on empirical verifiability is combined with Hume’s (and later Durkheim’s) theory of causality. It is this third version of positivism that has had the strongest impact on the social sciences grounded in the belief that the society is a system that can be compared to the physical world; that facts can be differentiated from values and are value-free; and that there is a certain regularity in the social world that can be compared to the physical (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; May, 2003; Morrow, 1994).

If Comte and Durkheim founded positivism, Hegel and Marx originated nonpositivist, interpretivist methods of research, which today are referred to variously as constructionism, critical theory, and structuralism. These theories were developed to contend with the same changing world of urban and industrial modernity. Interpretivist approaches are concerned with the empathic understanding of human action rather than with external forces that have no meaning for the people involved. Interpretivism takes into account differences between people as subjects, on the one hand, and the objects of natural sciences, on the other hand. This means that we have to grasp subjective meanings if we wish to understand social action. The main difference between positivist and interpretivist accounts lies in their respective emphasis on explaining versus understanding human behaviour (Hollis & Smith, 1990). Constructionism (or constructivism) is an ontological position that grows out of interpretivism in which social phenomena and their meaning are continually being accomplished by social actors, implying that such phenomena and categories are not only produced by social interaction but that they are always changing. The constructionist approach includes the observations of social scientists, whose knowledge is viewed as indeterminate and whose accounts of the social world are themselves constructions.

The coming together of the two faces of social science, the positivist and the interpretivist, take place in the synthesis of Weber, who is the first—and for a long time the only—scholar to combine the two epistemologies. Zeitlin’s account of the history of sociological theory identifies Weber as the scholar who balanced a materialist and an ideational account of the growth of modern societies (Zeitlin, 2001, pp. 197–199). Aware that there are both important social forces unavailable to human consciousness, but also equally important elements of social agency that are grounded in social understanding, Zeitlin (2001) summarizes Weber’s position in this way: “Sociological explanations must, therefore, be adequate at the level of meaning, but... explanations must also be adequate at the level of causality. The human condition is such that no science truly grasps its unique complexity that ignores either meaning or causality” (p. 255). Weber’s insight is foundational to more recent conceptual developments in sociology and underpins our own grounding of political psychology in an adequate epistemological framework. The basis of our political psychological understanding is the world of human intentions and purposes. However, since this object of our analytical focus is generated both by meaning and causality, our psychological studies are deeply grounded in historical and social-structural analyses.

As we have stated, positivism—including both empirical and logical positivism—has European roots. From the 1930s onwards, however, positivism spread throughout the United States, through the work of a combination of European expatriates and European-trained Americans. Positivism in America shared common characteristics with American pragmatism (DeWaal, 2005; Shook & Margolis, 2006). Once we consider positivism, therefore, we already see that its intellectual roots are complexly interwoven between the continents. Despite this, it is understandable that positivism, particularly in its “abstracted empiricist” or “dust bowl empiricist” form, has come to be regarded as more of an American than a European approach to political psychology. Paley (2008) explains dust bowl empiricism as a metaphor based upon the arbitrary and drifting dust and tumbleweeds of the American Midwest in the 1930s. In the dust bowl model, research is conducted atheoretically and facts accumulated in an arbitrary and naïve manner. More specifically, the term is associated with the
tradition of psychological research at the University of Minnesota in the 1940s. Positivist empiricism means taking the world of appearances—of overt phenomena in their pattern and regularity—as given. The simple regularity and patterning of events in the phenomenal world (or the absence of such) is taken as proof of causality. Such an epistemology, grounded like American pragmatism in common sense, tends to take root in settings where there are few competing forces of underlying left-right ideological struggle and tension—where the dialectics of Hegel and Marx are largely absent. In this regard, it is reasonable to assume that North America would constitute a more fertile ground for positivism. To the extent that this is valid, however, we need to consider the question of changing conditions—which we turn to below in our section on ideology and in our conclusion.

**Ideology**

Both liberalism and its ideological adversaries, conservatism and socialism, arose in Europe. The familiar work on the dialectics of struggle within Europe in contrast with the successful dominance of liberalism in the United States constructs a contrastive ideological history that is well-established. From Toqueville (1987) to Riesman (1962) to Hartz (1964) to Bellah et al. (1985), we have been reminded that the United States is fundamentally liberal. In such a context, there really were no underlying left-right tensions to push history along, even if the dynamics of American history were powerfully shaped by struggles over slavery, imperialism, and internal colonialism. How have these contrasting continental ideological patterns emerged and conditioned political psychology? While we can detect local and cultural bases for the emergence of discursive frames, there have also been continuities between the continents and beyond that are of increasing relevance.

In Europe, the specter haunting 19th-century social science was mass society: mass workforces, mass media, mass production, and the mass franchise, each generating crises. Mass society was the fulfilment of modernity, of enlightenment principles and the political philosophy of possessive individualism. The very huge and brash success of liberal capitalism generated fear and a call for reaction on the part of the conservatives, and frustration and a call for revolution on the part of socialists. The entire corpus of European social science can be regarded as a response to the shock of modernity, industrialization, capitalism, urbanization, secularism, and associated evils. Van Ginneken’s (1988) work on conservative elite theory and the quest for social stability in the French Third Republic refers to the national character studies of Boutmy and the work of LeBon on the Crowd. He also talks of the avowedly normative purpose of early social scientific research in Europe—to “bait and switch” the religious impulse into the nation—as opposed to the working class and socialism. This is what lay behind the Italian sociologists, Mosca, Pareto, and Michels on the inevitability of elites. As van Ginneken (1988, p. 5) tells us, political psychology has its roots in Paris and Torino, cities in which the 19th century was one of turmoil and danger and in which the quest for order had become paramount. The earliest European versions of political psychology attempted to describe modern society as one of the masses and the elites and to prescribe elite domination. Le Bon, author of *The Crowd* (1895), argued that the masses were susceptible to persuasion and seduction and that the wise elites would use nationalism to control and regulate their passions. These ideas of the bovine and emotionally reflexive character of the masses and the duty of the elites to govern were echoed in the Italian sociology of Mosca, Pareto, and Michels. The unorganized character of the masses is evidenced in Mosca’s *The Ruling Class: Elements of Political Science* (1960, originally 1896), while Pareto’s version of the circulation of elites emerges in his book *The Mind and Society* (1963, originally 1916). Michels’s contribution appears in his analysis of socialist political parties: *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (1959, originally 1911) in which he sets out The Iron Law of Oligarchy.

Freud’s political psychology is about the struggle between desire and order and the challenges of balance. This is the psychodynamic equivalent to Weberian sociology in which the expression of
human values is in tension with the abstract instrumentalism of technological and bureaucratic efficiency. Freud and Weber’s ideas, in combination with those of Marx, were to give rise to the Frankfurt School, whose work was published in the wake of the rise of authoritarianism. Horkheimer in his 1931 inaugural address as Director of the Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt insisted on a dialectical materialist understanding of history and that institute members should therefore explore the interconnection between the economic life of society, the psychic development of the individual, and transformations in the realm of culture (Held, 1980). Never able to adapt to life in the United States, émigré Frankfurt School intellectual Adorno in his New Left Review articles on sociology and psychology argued against the ideological limitations of individualist and overpsychologized social science. So too did American scholars Jacoby (1975) and Jay (1973) who refer to the Frankfurt School and Freudo-Marxism as ideologically based intellectual movements that were not able to take root in North America.

Returning to Bryder’s contrastive comments regarding transparency and closeness, we reiterate that the connections between real-world problems and the academy are as evident in the United States as they have been in Europe. If the European experience of the struggle against feudalism, class conflict, colonialism, and nationalism conditioned a cynical and pessimistic sense of determinism and entrapment, the American setting was premised on optimism, outward-looking perspectives, enthusiasm, and expansionism. With respect to the Chicago School of Park, Dewey, Mead, and Merriam in the 1920s and 1930s, their entire project was based upon the immediate need to understand community and integration and to deal with the influx of the masses from Europe (Shook & Margolis, 2006). In this sense, 20th-century Chicago plays the same role in the American context as van Ginneken’s Paris and Torino played in the 19th century. However, the theories developed to respond to such conditions can be broadly regarded as ideologically and methodologically American. In the United States of mass immigration and urban/industrial growth, liberal hegemony and the practices of the frontier mentality diminished the space for grand theorizing. Grounded in the premises of liberal individualism, Dewey and Mead developed variants of pragmatism in symbolic interactionism, and humanistic empiricism. The social structures that they envisaged were both invariant in their generalized capacity to reproduce themselves and yet open to variety and alternatives through individual consciousnesses. This kind of balance is captured in the looking-glass self, the “I and the me” of Mead’s Mind, Self, and Society (Mead, 1934). Methodologically, the social was understood as a backdrop as a mise-en-scène, rather than in terms of a dialectical and structural set of forces and relations that both conditioned and were conditioned by human agency. Having said this, Zeitlin (2001) makes the case for greater continuity between the pragmatists and the dialectical European intellectual traditions of Marx and Weber and, while we disagree, we acknowledge that complex cross-flows of ideas and ideals have sustained networks of interchange between the American and European academies from the beginning, with consequences that we elaborate below.

Grounded as it is on the basis of liberal hegemony, American social science in general, and political psychology in particular, has been less likely to recognize the place of the sociopolitical in the construction of the psychological. In the tradition of the pragmatists, Talcott Parsons’ Structural Functionalism develops a model of the social system as a huge and unified self-perpetuating engine of adaptation, goal-attainment, integration, and latent pattern-maintenance, in which there is little history or systemic conflict. The agentive basis of Parsons’ model is individualistic, and his functional theory lacks a dialectical structuralist basis. Given this broadly liberal-individualistic and pragmatic legacy, a comfortable and central role was played by natural scientific approaches in a North American context, both in psychology and in political science. Ideology met epistemology in the so-called “perestroika” debate in political science in which a number of prominent scholars complained that quantitative social science grounded in the liberal-individualistic assumptions of rational choice and political scientific “behavioralism” had influenced decision making on hiring,
promotion, curriculum, and publications in the United States, while others argued that such claims had been exaggerated (Kinnvall, 2005; Monroe, 2005).

Despite this, both socialism and communitarianism were to take root in the United States, and we expand below upon the intercontinental interchange of postmodern and postcolonial theorizing. Much of this cross-fertilization started in the 1960s and 1970s, and we have ever since been living through the dramatic—and often traumatic—consequences of Americans challenging or defending the discursive premises of their liberal individualistic foundations. The American academy has been particularly open to strands of ideological influence beyond the narrow band of left or right liberalism. As Thomas Bender and Carl E. Schorske (1997) suggest in their volume *American Academic Culture in Transformation*, different American disciplines reacted very differently to the social and political upheavals of the 1960s, which were themselves transcontinental in scope. The response in economics and philosophy was largely unnoticeable, while English changed dramatically with its debates on feminism, gender, race, and ethnicity. The emergence of cultural studies as a meta-discipline was also clearly related to the events of this time. American cultural studies were immediately developed out of the British Birmingham School (During, 1993). The intellectual origins of the Birmingham School combine continental European social theory and philosophy with the post-War British cultural critics (Hoggart, 1958; Williams, 1958). Political science, and perhaps even more so, political psychology, were also touched by these processes. The events of the 1960s, with their emphasis on culture and community, prompted a number of scholars within the American social sciences to look to continental European philosophy to address the new agenda, thus establishing a transdisciplinary intellectual discourse (Holden, 2002). The critical turn in political science and other fields can therefore partly be explained by the import of ideas from the continent, such as those of Habermas, Foucault, Derrida, and Lyotard. As noted by Katznelson (1997), a different U.S. academic community was to emerge in the 1960s across a number of disciplines, a community that was more eclectic and pluralistic and thus more open to alternative ideas. The influence from the European continent during the 1970s and the 1980s supplied such alternative forms of radical political and epistemological opposition to the perceived liberal orthodoxies of the late Cold War period.

It remains difficult to be definitive about these claims and counterclaims regarding the impact of ideology in the academy. Among the looser and often taken-for-granted assumptions of political psychological research across the United States and Europe is that European contributions are somehow ideologically more radical and progressive. We have argued that ideological assumptions have been lacking in specificity and nuance. Adequate study of the matter would require at least three levels of scrutiny if we are to explore its full complexity. First, how do we in fact operationalize ideological concepts? What do we actually *mean* by liberal and socialist, communitarian and individualist, or more vaguely, radical and reactionary? Second, how do we establish a universe of enquiry? Where do we look to find our cases and our evidence? Given adequate operationalization of our concepts, an empirical enquiry might reveal, for instance, that the pages of *Political Psychology* include a substantial number of articles by American-based critical and radical scholars as well as many liberal individualists from elsewhere. But it is the third level of analysis that moves us beyond the assumptions of the standard empiricist scientific method and is to us most interesting. What does the specific work of scholars in each setting mean in the context of that time, territory, and place? What does it mean to be a Marxist scholar in France or Italy in the 1970s, countries in which Communist parties routinely stood for office? How does this differ from being an American Marxist say in the same decade, in a political culture that regarded Communism and communists as unpatriotic and potential enemies? If we really want to understand the continuities and discontinuities among scholars across settings and times, we need to attend to such conditions and the more qualitative approaches through which we might explore them. We need to examine how scholars have worked within the parameters set by those discourses that are available to them, and therefore how far their scholarship represents a meaningful departure from the dominant paradigms.
Methodology

Just as there are no necessary connections between epistemology and ideology, there are no necessary distinctions between either of these and methodological approach. The statement that positivists will be ideological liberals and therefore employ abstracted empiricism, or individualistic psychology, or quantitative methods in general contains a number of unproven assumptions. And yet, methodological distinctions have been generalized when thinking through the comparisons between North America and Europe. In such oversimplified versions of continental difference, North America uses abstracted empiricism, while in Europe a more theory-driven and historicist approach predominates. Europeans employ qualitative methods and Americans quantitative, while the thick descriptive, verstehende, and anthropological approaches of the Europeans are not generally practiced in North American political psychology (van Strien, 1997). Referring to social psychology in general, Parker (1989) says: “Although the revolt against the cultural dominance of American laboratory-experimental social psychology in Europe was traced by some writers to the impact of Paris May 1968 events, the concern with ‘ideology’ as an object of study has deeper roots. European social psychology has historically had a closer relationship with research in sociology and anthropology than the American variety” (p. 15). While Parker’s claims underplay the impact of sociological social psychology in the American academy, which we have elaborated in the section on ideology, it is nonetheless evident that European and North American research traditions in social psychology have diverged. The legacy of Henri Tajfel’s influence and the work of Serge Moscovici have given rise to Social Identity Theory, Self Categorization Theory, and Social Representations Theory, and more broadly critical, discursive, and psychological traditions in Europe. These research traditions have influenced research in North America, but have not so far exerted a major impact. As we exemplify below, most of the contemporary research that builds upon these traditions continues to be conducted by Europeans (Andrews, 2007; Billig, 2008; Daanen, 2009; Edwards, 1995; Hopkins & Dixon, 2006; Howarth, 2006; Lowe & Muldoon, 2010; Parker, 2009; Reicher, 2004; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001a, 2001b; Weltman & Billig, 2001).

Writing in 1986, Bryder said: “In general, political psychology in Western Europe since World War II increasingly has modeled itself on research done across the Atlantic. At present, however, there are signs that political psychology may be breaking new paths in Europe, which Americans may come to understand only as time passes” (p. 436). In so doing, Bryder indexed a kind of intellectual interchange that, as we have argued, has always been viable and interactive. There is indeed extensive evidence of transatlantic collaborations and mutual influences. When it comes to methodology, we concur with van Strien (1997) that while Europe and North America have each developed their own research traditions, and while each remains distinctive, patterns of cross-fertilization have been prominent and the direction of influence has flowed in both directions. Increasingly, the methodological innovations grounded in one continent have rapid reverberations in the other. Bryder and van Strien’s contentions regarding interchanges and cross-fertilization make reference to continents as separate and distinct entities and reference a late-modern “Westphalian” global order of sovereign states each with their own socioeconomic structures and cultures. As we argue below, the emerging realities of globalization have conditioned a thoroughgoing transformation of time and space, in such a way that the very dualism or binary opposition of continents is of decreasing relevance.

Beyond the Discursive Frames

Our approach toward political psychology and our expectations for its further development incline us to supplant binaries and dualisms as we think through the relevance of space in the contemporary global experience. However, this does not mean that we reject the specificity of the
local and the familiar in the development of cultures. The work of Jessop and his colleagues (Jessop,
Brenner, & Jones, 2008) clears away underbrush in attempting to think through the spatio-temporal
bases of knowledge, discourses, ideologies, and methodologies in the emerging world. In order to
tame the tide of spatial lexicons that have emerged past three decades, they distil four key dimensions
of sociospatial relations: Territory, Place, Scale, and Network. Increasingly, they argue, “inherited
views of place as a fixed, areal, self-contained, and more or less unique unit of sociospatial
organization were rejected. Instead, places were increasingly understood as relationally constituted,
polyvalent processes, embedded in broader sets of social relations” (p. 390). The modern version
of the nation-state is bounded by territorial borders and frontiers in which there is sovereignty and
through which there is little permeability. Jessop and his colleagues point out that territory is
increasingly complicated through the unevenness of distinct places within a given territory, through
the impact of scale in developments such as multilevel governance, and through the increasing
relevance of networks, within states, between states, across states, and on a global scale. As a
consequence, binary concepts such as metropolis and hinterland, local and exotic, unitary and
federal, urban and rural are increasingly in question. On the basis of these new developments, the
historical and social structural relations that gave rise to the binaries of epistemology, methodology,
and ideology need to be revisited. As we shall argue below, the grand narratives of traditional
ideologies, epistemological certainties, and methodological paradigms are of decreasing relevance as
global forces shape new social, organizational, institutional, and therefore psychological orienta-
tions. With its pluralistic heritage of cross-disciplinary interchange and openness and multidisci-
plinary collaborations, political psychology is well positioned to adjust to the new global realities. As
we shall further argue, such a global orientation has been conditioning a series of social and political
reactions, some of them violent, that are attempting to recover, reinvent, and reinforce the cultural
and institutional forms of hitherto dominant discourses—of nation, religion, and gender. In arguing
that political psychology should adapt to and engage with the emerging global world, we are not only
promoting a necessary intellectual adaptation, we are also privileging one side in a normative
conflict.

In the contemporary context, the societal bases of ideologies have eroded and with them the
clarity of those ideological parameters themselves. Communitarianism, which melds elements of
liberal individualism with traditional conservatism, constituted a renovated discourse in both
Europe and the United States throughout the 1990s and into the new century. In Europe, it played
out in the context of third wayism and its after-effects—the collapse of traditional socialist parties,
the rise of neo-nationalist parties, and the hybrid forms of communitarianism grafted onto liberal
and increasingly trans-European state forms. Simultaneously, despite the very different ideological
orientations of the two presidents, communitarianism was adapted in the American context
throughout the presidencies of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, exemplified in programs such
as Clinton’s welfare reforms and Bush’s “faith-based initiatives.” In Europe, there has been a
retreat to the familiarity of community, often in response to perceived notions of increased immi-
gration. This has resulted in a renewed assertion of the homogeneous nation-states in which
borders are clearly defined and where the multicultural state, liberalism, the European Union, as
well as globalization more generally are presented as threats among extreme right-wing politi-
cians. In the United States, the Tea Party and associated antitax movements reflect a widespread
moral panic at perceived threats to individual liberty from the interventionist state as well as
symbolic racism confronted both with a black president and fears concerning uncontrolled borders
and immigration.

The sense of desperation inherent in these movements reflects the erosion of traditional ideo-
logical distinctions that permitted meaningful statements to be made regarding European and North
American differences. Such distinctions have gradually been eroding with the globalization of
culture and the reformulation of social bonds. Empirical evidence of this may be seen in the
aggression of reactionary ideological movements in both settings that seek to “securitize” political societies through the invocation of nation, religion, and other associated anchors. The concept of securitization comes from recent International Relations theory and refers to the politicization of certain phenomena that enable the use of extraordinary means in the name of security (Kinnvall, 2004, 2006, 2007; Kinnvall & Lindén, 2010; Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2011; Nesbitt-Larking, 2009). Securitization studies aim to understand “who securitizes, on what issues (threats), for whom (referent object), why, with what results, and not least, under what conditions” (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998, p. 32). It can therefore be interpreted as the process of labelling a particular referent object (e.g., migration or cultural and religious change) as an existential threat, which implies that an individual’s or a collective’s sense of the self is seen as being in jeopardy (Buzan et al., 1998; Huysmans, 2006; Wæver, 1995). Securitization is important for conceptualizing the effects of global transformations in which absolute truths, borders, and identities are being challenged and changed. It is likewise important for understanding the closing down of multiple voices, of pluralism and of silencing in the name of fear and terror, thus reducing the heterogeneity of positions and silencing other personal and social positions. Indeed, the fostering of an individual and collective self that is able to move away from confrontational self-other relations can be promoted only when people are made aware of the dynamics resulting in closure and antagonism and when the discursive and material structures change to become inclusive rather than exclusive.

Ideologies on the ground have evolved beyond the traditional left-right spectrum and the familiar labels are increasingly difficult to sustain, either on the part of lay actors or those social scientists who observe them. The concept of securitization brings social and political psychology to the heart of analyzing contemporary belief systems grounded in perceived needs and preferences. The global reach of studies in securitization can meaningfully bring together the invocation of evangelical religion in the United States and the nation in Europe as symbolic signifiers that serve as anchors in responding to apprehended threats to community cohesion through fear and doubt regarding both the immigrant and the “stranger within,” whether Muslim or Hispanic.

Many European societies have had to deal with the legacy of colonial power. These historical relations have created not only specific relationships with non-European societies but also particular patterns of postcolonial migration in which class, religion, gender, and ethnicity have played an important role. These colonial and postcolonial realities have given rise to subfields of political psychological analysis that have their origins in the European experience. And yet, with increasing rapidity, they have become universalized and as prominent in the American academy as in the European. While postcolonial theory has its origins in the European experience, the various postcolonial diaspora and associated academics have also become rooted in North America. Critical race and gender theory has brought together postcolonial realities with the scholarship emerging from the American experience of slavery. Postcolonial theory (Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1979; Spivak, 1988) and Intersectionality theory (Collins, 2002; Crenshaw, 1991) are by definition global in their intellectual origins and equally influential in Europe and the United States. At the same time, it is true that certain intellectual approaches have been slower to disseminate. Discursive, narrative, and rhetorical critical psychology (Andrews, 2007; Billig, 1996, 2008; van Dijk, 2008; Edwards, 1995; Hopkins & Dixon, 2006; Parker, 1989, 1996, 2009; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Reicher, 2004; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001a, 2001b; Weltman & Billig, 2001; Wetherell, 1996; Yates & Hiles, 2010) is grounded in the European experience, and in particular the discursive frames of historicism and structuralism. By way of contrast, the American academy, as Bryder has argued (1986, p. 436) has lacked a certain “transparency,” and is often ahistorical (Brewster Smith, 1983). By transparency, Bryder means openly derived from and driven by social and political agendas in the everyday world and its struggles. As we have argued, we do not agree. Where we do find common ground is in the relative absence of historicism and structuralism in shaping American social scientific research, and this is exemplified in the claims of Renshon (2002) who laments the collective amnesia of the cultural
anthropological roots of American political psychology. In struggling toward meaning in post–cold war America, he says:

Fuelled in part by enormous, and in this century, unprecedented numbers of new immigrants, the United States is becoming dramatically more diverse—racially, ethnically, and culturally. . . . At the same time, the stability of American political and normative culture has been challenged in recent decades by an assertive expansion of individual and group rights, acerbic debates regarding the legitimacy and limits of these claims, and a preference on the part of national political leaders to finesse rather than engage these controversies. Freed by the end of the cold war from a need to focus on external enemies, the country appears at a crossroad . . . while America is undeniably more diverse than at any time in its history, Americans appear more fragmented, alienated, and polarized. . . . Is it inevitable that cultural, psychological, and political diversity lead to a fragmented and thus dysfunctional national identity? Can it be avoided, and if so, how? (pp. 130–131)

For Renshon, the critical question is: “What does it mean to be an American? Given enormous diversity, what if anything, binds us together as a country? What will happen to the psychological elements that have been essential to our country’s history and development—a combination of pragmatic excellence, achievement, mobility, and the ambition that underlies them?” (p. 132). These are powerful questions indeed and the political agendas of Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and now Barack Obama, each in its own way, have attempted to generate answers. But importantly they are also the very central questions of Angela Merkel, David Cameron, and Nicolas Sarkozy in their respective European national settings, as well as a broader range of world leaders beyond Europe and North America.

**Conclusion**

Situating the contemporary scene in this way, it is not at all clear that we can continue to speak coherently of a distinctive and homogeneous European or American political psychology. What caused and sustained the first big historical distinction is the matter of spatial relations in the modern era, from the enlightenment to the 20th century—the cartography of empire and periphery. In this context, North America was other, was exile, sanctuary, paradise, and escape. These tropes ran throughout the history of modernity and are exemplified in the sad exile of the Frankfurt School in the Nazi era. While the nation-state remains relevant and cultures are localized, the dangers and opportunities associated with contemporary living have become more networked, more readily transmitted up and down the scale from local to global, more liquid, more rapidly broadcast, viral and virtual through the global nets of communication. Recent developments in the International Society of Political Psychology illustrate these trends. In 2008, Reicher wrote “The Challenge of Internationalization for ISPP,” in which he noted that the overwhelming number of ISPP members were resident in Europe or North America and called upon the society to be active in “building political psychology in new places” (p. 17), not as an “add-on” but as “a lens through which we interrogate everything we do” (p. 17). In response, the Governing Council struck a special committee on internationalization and continues to work toward diversification beyond the two continents.

While its object is the past, history is written very much in terms of the exigencies of the present and with a clear view to shaping preferred futures through the pedagogy of the past. This applies to all of us who have from time to time attempted to capture something about the changing character of political psychology. Our contribution in this article is to point to the transcendence of dualisms and to imagine a more globalized political psychology in which territory, place, scale, and network are mixed and matched in a proliferation of ways, of which Europe and North America is merely one
mode of differentiation among many. As with much in the late modern experience, the growing complexity of borders and margins can be celebrated as an expression of creative opportunity or feared as existential threat. Contemporary citizens are increasingly likely to perceive their spatial belonging and rootedness as existing in a spatially remote location as well as in their physical locale and to be connected to their global contemporaries through networks of virtual communication rather than physical contiguity. Borders are becoming increasingly elusive due to a number of factors, such as technological and communicative developments; local or supranational decision-making procedures rather than state-specific ones; migration and transmigration; increasingly borderless economies; as well as cultural and psychological questioning and cross-fertilization more generally. As borders become more permeable and space and time increasingly compressed, some people—as we have seen—become involved in bordering practices in which they attempt to reestablish secure borders around themselves, their group, their religion, their nation, and so on.

We continue to search for new metaphors and new models to imagine the 21st century and to renew our discursive frames. The modernist cartography of Westphalian nation-states, routes of empire, and sovereign boundaries has been radically changed, and we are living through the consequences. Given that we are through with the era of the masses and the associated binary oppositions of ideologies and epistemologies, the very substratum of divisions between European and American political psychology has been eroding. We are into something recombinatory in which the old dualisms are increasingly redundant and in which continental shifts are multiple, unpredictable, plurilocal, and virtual (Archibugi, 2003). The emerging world is one of geographical, virtual, and social mobility; global economic and cultural consumption; awareness of global interdependency with attendant risks and opportunities; the erosion and constant remaking of cognitive, affective, and perceptual maps; growing semiotic and linguistic sophistication; and openness (Szerszynski & Urry, 2006, p. 115). The existing language of social differentiation that identifies discrete and bounded cultural entities associated with ethnicity, religion, race, region, nation, gender, or other fixed characteristics fails to capture the hybrid and complex dynamics of identities in formation, and yet reinforces the power of those entrepreneurs of identity who claim to speak on behalf of such imagined and constructed communities. We have moved far beyond the dualisms of epistemology, ideology, and theory that have conditioned discourses of intellectual division between Europe and North America in the past. Political psychology as a field must attempt to deal with the consequences of an increasingly borderless world in which identities are fluid, transformed, hybrid, or in search of secure identities. Such an orientation is, for us, highly suited to the tasks of developing truly global traditions and centres of research in political psychology throughout the world, notably the postcolonial world and the global south, while retaining an openness to whatever the discipline might become.

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