A Review and Analysis of Eviatar Zerubavel's *Social Mindscapes: An Invitation to Cognitive Sociology*

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Psychologists believe the human experience is the same throughout all cultures and societies. However, where psychology ends, Zerubavel's cognitive sociology steps in and further explains the actual disparity between all societies that psychology has failed to elaborate on. As there is a functionalist approach to division of labor, so is there a division of thought in modern society. These divisions are separated by perceiving (social optics), attending (the social gates of consciousness), classifying (the social division of the world), assigning meaning (social meanings), remembering (social memories), and reckoning time (standard time). In essence, according to Zurabavel, we are socialized into deterministic thinkers with no free will to think. We are left to only think what is socialized to be normal.

Psychology poses that there is a universal human experience such as fear, happiness, or grief that is consistent throughout all societies. Involved, it seems, are human psychological and physical mechanisms that indeed do seem quite homogenous whether experienced in Greece in 2000 AD or in Tokyo, Japan last night. What becomes blurred is what influences reactions of[1] fear or happiness, indicating that it is not a universal human affair. For example, happiness in Mexico may be experienced differently than in Serbia; or perhaps fear for a Tibetan Buddhist may be experienced differently from a Wall Street economist. It indicates that at work are elements beyond the limits of psychology and the assumed independent mind. The mind in effect, is a temporal space that appears as a human characteristic that functions as a lens to view reality. It is this supposed reality that reveals the variations of cognition. Zerubavel's work attempts to penetrate this aspect in asserting that human thought is not a consistently individual subjective act, nor is it a consistently objective human one either. Instead, he argues that there is a middle ground which he classifies as the inter-

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subjective aspect of human cognition, suggesting that thought is in effect influenced by a membership to thought communities. To set up his theory, he delineates three classifications of cognition: individualistic, sociological and universal. By doing so, Zerbavel rejects individualistic and universal forms of cognition, suggesting that they engage in assumptions of conventionalism and reductionism. What he finds is that sociological cognition actually fuses the two polar assumptions of cognition and serves as a middle ground; thus calling for sociological thinking, or cognitive sociology. As Zerubavel (1997) indicates:

> Cognitive sociology reminds us that we think not only as individuals and human beings, but also as social beings, products of particular social environments that affect as well as constrain the way we cognitively interact with the world. (P. 6).

In this regard, Zerubavel recognizes a cognitive diversity indicating that "It is society, after all, that determines what we come to regard as 'reasonable' or nonsensical', and it usually does so by exerting tacit pressure which we rarely even notice unless we try to resist it" (Zerubavel 1997: 13). More to the point, he finds that a comparative study is in place in order to reveal the normative nature of thinking, implying that thought is molded by socialization. This explains cognitive subcultures such as Southern Californians, students, mechanics, or poets; cognitive deviants such as atheists in Christian communities, and cognitive norms such as the normalcy of eating beef over dog meat in America. Cognitive socialization is Zerubavel's (1997) theoretical premise:

> As we become socialized and learn to see the world through mental lenses of particular thought communities, we come to assign to objects the same meaning that they have for others around us, to both ignore and remember the same things that they do, and to laugh at the same things that they find funny. Only then do we actually 'enter' the social world. (P. 15)

Cognitive diversity signifies that individuals engage in multiple thought communities, and like the engineer or mystic, indicates that in modern society there is a cognitive division of thought as promulgated by the division of labor. Modernity and society impose a multiplicity of thought communities: the church, the office, the street, the club, the school, the market, etc. To illustrate the scope and agenda of cognitive sociology, Zerubavel discusses six particular cognitive elements to reveal the relevance of inter-subjective and normative thinking which are: social optics, social consciousness, the social division of the world, social meanings, social memory, and standard time. Zerubavel formats his work as an illustrative outline to demonstrate the insight and depth in his proposition for cognitive sociology. The following is a review and interpretation of these cognitive elements.

Social Optics

By establishing the criteria for cognitive sociology, Zerubavel exposes that

individuals do not engage the world with a "tabula rasa", but rather with cognitive commitments, or perceptions. He suggests that we view and identify the world or social structures not objectively, but in a consistent tunneling of the world through our socialized minds, rather than exposing the mind to the world. In this regard, the mind coerces reality.

To illustrate, Zerubavel evokes Columbus' "discovery" of America and his insist-ence upon his reaching of the Indies, in spite of the Cuban natives informing him of his error. Further, scientists who advocate objective facts in essence observe through the lens of their field; thus this observation is subjective. These examples, according to Zerubavel, express a mental gaze that makes reality pluralistic. An economist gazes and assesses the market through statistics, surplus, investments, stocks and de-mand, while an immigrant farm worker gazes at the economy by job stability, affordability of milk and gas, and an assessment of his sore back, or arthritic knee. Zerubavel asserts that mental gazing is inter-subjective, indicating that Columbus, like the economist or farm worker, took "cognitive stances as members of a particular social environment" (Zerubavel 1997:32)– the Catholic Spanish Crown, Wall Street or the United Farm Workers. These communities create optical norms.

The Social Gates of Consciousness

Zerubavel then transitions to the act of cognitive attention asserting that individuals develop mental horizons, in effect categorizing reality by attention and inattention, or by foreground and background. As an example that we propose, a Democratic Party activist may hold Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton as pivotal candidates of historical change, while another individual may find that Obama and Clinton simply represent a branch of the power structure that actually limits change. As a result, "change" is interpreted at various levels of attention or inattention, and it expresses the aspect of mental horizons. Zerubavel finds that these horizons "…basically protect us from cognitive predicament of being constantly bombarded by an undifferentiated stream of stimuli" (Zerubavel 1997:36).

In the same manner, Zerubavel finds that mental horizons bring forth moral focusing. As he illustrates, a pro-life individual will morally focus on saving the unborn life while denying the same right to the convicted murderer. Ex-pressing itself in these examples of thought communities are mental horizons that influence what will be perceived as foreground or background. Thus, "*society…defines what we consider relevant* (42)" and therefore opens and closes the social gates of consciousness.

The Social Division of the World

Zerubavel suggests that society also has influence upon how the individual categorizes and classifies the world. He also observes that each society draws different meanings of the same reality. A cow may be classified as "edible" in the United States, while in India it is classified as "sacred." These classi-fications apply to all facets of reality drawn from the community's inter-pretations that then mold and influence

the individual. As a result, members of the thought community formulate quite homogenous classifications amongst them-selves. Further, Zerubavel discovers insightful nuances in these cognitive classifications or categorizations: rigidity, fuzziness, and flexibility.

Rigid classifications are found in the sacred and profane as observed by Durkheim in the manner that religion classifies the world through sin and evil. As he wrote: "The fundamental categories of thought…have religious origins" (Fields 1995:421). This may also be evident in bureaucratic definitions of official versus unofficial; public versus private; coworker versus; friend. There are clear distinctions in classifications. Zerubavel indicates that fuzzy classifications involve "mental promiscuity" as found in the thought community of artists who fuse the sacred and profane by wearing or creating fantastic attire or provocative images and lyrics that sustain their expected fuzziness, that upon exiting the artistic lair, become rigid classifications that adhere to the norms of a new thought community. Zerubavel also finds this fuzziness in intimacy, humor or comedy. Lastly, flexible classifications are in play in its fluidity of identity since playing involves the recalibration of roles and expectations as dictated by the game.

The key argument in this analysis for Zerubavel is that the classification of sacredness or profane varies between groups as well as over time. The element of social meanings further highlights this aspect.

Social Meanings

Zerubavel considers symbols as being of high significance. As he indicates: "Using symbols presupposes a mental association of two elements one of which (the 'signifier') is regarded as representing, or 'standing for', the other (the 'signified'). The meaning of a present, thus, is the personal affection it is supposed to represent" (Zerubavel 1997:68). What he finds is that signifiers typify a particular element such as illness or the color blue, but are provided two distinct associations of either natural or artificial association. "Illness" (the signified) is typified by a natural association of indicators such as a "symptom" (the signifier) that evokes images of bleeding, sickness, death. In the case of the color "blue", it obtains artificial associations via symbols such as masculinity, a newborn boy, etc. Hence, the latter is driven by social convention signifying that social meanings vary from society to society or from thought community to thought community as in the case of the cross in Christianity having a different meaning in Mayan culture, or a gun for a hunter as opposed to a suicidal individual.

Meanings, according to Zerubavel, are packaged within a thought community whereby the Star Spangled Banner, as he suggests, may evoke a different meaning for an American than for a Bulgarian. He indicates that involved are different mental associations to the symbols; therefore provoking different meanings. Since individuals overlook the conventional associations they make, Zerubavel indicates that the symbols are therefore susceptible to reification; thus we confuse the inter-subjective with the objective. For example, the manner in which functionalists reify crime or

deviance as concrete and as "fact" is to engage in artificial association.

Social Memories

Zerubavel (1997) proposes that the past and what we remember, is also affected by the social environment. In this vein, he finds cognitive psychology's deficiency in recognizing this phenomenon. He states:

> The notion that there are certain things that one should forget also underscores the normative dimension of memory, which is typically ignored by cognitive psychology. Like the curricular institutionalization of required history classes in school, it reminds us that remembering is more than just a spontaneous act ,as it also happens to be regulated by unmistakably social rules of remembrance that tell us quite specifically what we should remember and what we must forget. (P. 84).

The framing of the past, in effect, also frames the boundaries of the individual's memory. Thus; for example, we interpret that for the history teacher to glorify the revolutionary genius of the Founding Fathers in America, while omitting the revolutionary genius of other foreign movements, is to engage in the social framing of memory. It implies that the concept of revolution and our memory to it as Americans, is only legitimate in history and not in contemporary life both domestically or abroad. Forgetting, it seems, is a social process of memory regulation. Zerubavel illustrates that the classification of "history" and "pre history", or "pre-Columbian" in essence regulates the memory of history students in silencing and forgetting pre-1492 in the same manner the sociology student is socialized into commencing studies of the field with Comte and not with Aristotle or Plato. He finds that this "is neither logical nor natural. It is unmistakably social, normative convention (86)". He asserts that at play is a process of mnemonic socialization or a learned tradition of remembering. Mnemonic socialization is particularly biased and is a type of memory that is communal more so than personal such as the Jews memory of the holocaust or Dodger fan's memory of Kirk Gibson's 1988 World Series home run.

Standard Time

Lastly, Zerubavel proposes that the mental "placement" of time is dependent on social environment. In other words, individuals create inter-subjective time frames: start date at work, the day I ran the Los Angeles Marathon, the Whittier earthquake of 1987, etc. Involved is what Zerubavel finds as the formulation of chronological eras and socio-temporal landmarks which serve as "temporal anchors". He indicates that these anchors not only organize and shape the past, they also shape present and future time whereby the essence of a common time arrangement between individual and the society is to allow for participation in the world. According to Zerubavel, "standard time is one of the pillars of the Inter–subjective social world*" (1997: 103).*

Without this mental placement then, is to engage in what he defines as

"mental exile". He illustrates how castaway sailors or prisoners in solitary confinement gravitate towards keeping track of the days in spite of no contact or pragmatic need for time to avoid "socio-temporal disorientation." He indicates that adhering to this universal system of time is not natural, but as he suggests, normative. The transition from solar time, to mathematical time via the clock illustrates this socio-temporal arrangement. To not subscribe to such a universal and almost reified view of time is to be susceptible to becoming cognitively deviant.

Assessment

The essence of Zerubavel's work is to demonstrate and assert that we are not romantically original and spontaneous thinkers, that as social beings, we are instead normative thinkers, or socialized thinkers whereby we limit the scope and range of our thought as illustrated and brought forth by Zerubavel. In effect, the environment and social structure that is a force upon our actions is more specifically a force upon our cognition; thereby, being a phenomenon that can be investigated by a sociology of the mind. This reviewer interprets this as an extension of Durkheim's analysis of norms, whereby Zerubavel intelligently takes this element of social life, transcending the social sphere and finds the relationship to the mental sphere - hence; a "social mindscape".

In so doing, he seems to take aim at psychology's juggernaut over its understanding and analysis of cognition by indicating that psychology fails to observe the social influence upon the mind. In sum, it falls short in understanding the full cognitive processes since the mind is not in a vacuum, independent of external influences, but rather in communion with social life.

As a criticism, Zerubavel's analysis lacks an assessment of the hierarchical nature of modern societies and their influence upon cognition. In other words, he does not address the structures of ideology, coercion, and propaganda, or how artificial associations can become manipulated and exploited on behalf of the social regulators of thought. For example, "immigrant" can have various associations such as "problematic", "newcomer" or "alien", while "homosexual" may be associated with "sinner" rather than "same-sex orienttation." Zerubavel does not address the dialectical nature between cultures and subcultures and what this writer would assess as the dynamics of thought politics. In this sense, he approaches his subject in an almost functionalist perspective, not entirely delineating the power structure and its exploitative nature.

In reading his piece, this reviewer is reminded of George Orwell's *1984* and the looming Thought Police. As Orwell wrote: "Thoughtcrime they called it. Thoughtcrime as not a thing that could be concealed forever. You might dodge successfully for a while, even for years, but sooner or later they were bound to get you" (1983:16). Fiction came to life under McCarthyism as it did in Chile under the Pinochet run D.I.N.A. forces. Likewise we find a government who advocates to the citizenry that they are "either with us or against us." This has all the characteristics of thought politics that makes

thinking a deviant act. Orwell seemed to have recognized this aspect of reification on behalf of the power structure in the name of sustaining cognitive control by blurring contradictions in his now famous phrase: "War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery and Ignorance is Strength."

What Zerubavel brings forth is a fantastic realm of social life from the micro and macro perspective, revealing the mind's dependence on the environment and the processes of cognitive inheritance. In effect, we think with bequeathed ideas and parameters that society and the environment have provided; hence, we are conditioned thinkers. The danger is in the capacity of powerful interests in manipulating such cognitive mechanisms. Marx understood this quite well in indicating that, "…the reform of consciousness consists only in enabling the world to clarify its consciousness, in waking it from its dream about itself, in explaining to it the meaning of its own actions" (15). He would go on to call for this "clarity" of mind against ruling class ideology. We consider, then, that Zerubavel's work is significant and relevant in bringing forth a particularly keen sociological imagination, requiring a further step by assessing power interests and their molding of what this writer considers "popular" or "appropriate" consciousness to then address the politics of thought through cognitive sociology.

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