

# History

## Interview with Carl Ratner

Entrevista com Carl Ratner

Entrevista con Carl Ratner



He is a social psychologist, director of the Institute for Cultural Research and Education, in the USA. Adjunct professor in the doctoral program, Autonomous University of Morelos, in Mexico. He has published many books, such as *Cooperation Community and Co-ops in a Global Age*, *Vygotsky y La Psicología Macro-cultural – Obras Escogidas de Carl Ratner*, in Spanish. He is a member of the International Association for Cross cultural psychology and won several international awards.

**INTERVIEWER:** Katia Cristina Silva Forli Bautheney

**Katia: What kind of relations established between Vygotsky's social-historical theory and macro-cultural psychology in the explanation of the origins and characteristics of what you call 'Psychological phenomena'?**

C.Ratner: I developed my approach to psychology that I call macro cultural psychology as an extension of Vygotsky's works, and I strongly believe that Vygotsky was a macro cultural psychologist in his outlook. Most of his work did not explore macro cultural factors in detail. Most of his work explored more general interpersonal relations: the way caregivers socialize children, like the zone of proximal development. But I think it's very clear that really the impulse that motivated his work was a deep concern with social factors, especially social transformation. Vygotsky was a very strong

supporter of the Russian Revolution, he was clearly a Marxist; he was very concerned about issues of exploitation and social class. One of his quotes is that the individual psychology is structured by his social class position; he strongly believed that social transformation was necessary for psychological development and psychological improvement. So, he mentions these things throughout his work, even though he didn't have time to explore them. And because he didn't have time to explore them, I decided that would do that. Another reason for developing macro cultural psychology is because cultural psychologists, even psychologists who follow Vygotsky also did not develop his macro cultural perspective. And, in fact, I have to say that they actually tried to minimize it. An example that I give in my book *Macro Cultural Psychology* is the very famous and very important work by van de

Veer and Valsiner, *Understanding Vygotsky*, and in the entire book, they never mention the word social class until the last 10 pages or so; the last 10 pages, they have some casual, brief comment, like 'Vygotsky did say something about social class', whereas the quote I just gave you shows that he was much more deeply concerned about social class and he wrote articles that talked about the necessity of overcoming social class, that talked about the necessity of overcoming capitalism; he says that capitalism actually stunts psychological development and socialist transformation is actually necessary to really liberate people. So, he says all of these things in different places, but he didn't develop them. And so, that's what I try to do. And I developed macro cultural psychology as a comprehensive psychological theory. So, I tried to develop Vygotsky's ideas by integrating them into a macro cultural perspective. So, when he talks about how important social interaction is for psychological development, I concretize that by identifying specific macro cultural factors that are involved in psychological development. So that's the kind of extension that I made. I took his general ideas and then I concretize them with macro cultural factors and then giving examples from macro cultural factors. And so, I developed this comprehensive psychological theory that identifies macro cultural origins of psychological phenomena, and macro cultural characteristics of psychological phenomena, and macro cultural socialization of psychological phenomena, and macro cultural functions of psychological phenomena. So what I'm saying is that psychological phenomena are not just involved in interpersonal social processes, but they're really basically involved in macro cultural processes. And I've identified three general categories of macro cultural factors. One of them is social institutions, and one of them is cultural artifacts, and another is cultural concepts. And what I'm saying is that these are the cornerstones of culture. If you look at any culture you can clearly see that they're based around these three factors. And I'm saying that this is really where psychological phenomena are born, this is the origin of them. As people construct these macro cultural factors, that's when they construct psychological phenomena. And one example is that as the capitalist class arose and as it started to develop capitalist economic relations, these relations were private interactions among individual capitalists who owned resources and made all the decisions for how the resources should be allocated. So, from that, developed a whole concept of the individual self, because it was developed in the macro cultural process of forming private property and individual decision-making about that property and ownership of that property, and that's where the individual self arose. It didn't arise, it wasn't born, within families; it didn't happen that one day, you know, mothers and fathers in the 17<sup>th</sup> century said 'gee, let's treat our child as an individual and let's treat ourselves as an individuals'. That's not where it started. It started at the macro level. And so that's an example of what I try to do. Find historical examples of important psychological phenomena and I find that they were in fact developed on the macro cultural level. So, it really changes the whole view of psychology. Instead of thinking of

psychology as interpersonal or personal or natural, I'm thinking of psychology as a different level of phenomenon. It's really a cultural phenomenon. And Vygotsky certainly had this perspective. His view was definitely that psychological phenomena are cultural phenomena. But as I said, his main emphasis was on the interpersonal social level and, so, I'm moving all of these up to that level. So, that's a way in which psychological phenomena originate in macro cultural factors. And then, I also identify the fact that the psychological mechanisms themselves are basically the recapitulation of macro cultural factors. And Vygotsky actually said this in his first book *The psychology of art*. He said that art is a technique of social feelings and he actually used the word 'technique of feelings' or 'of emotions'. And it's really interesting that Foucault uses exactly the same term, he talks about the technology of the self way back in 19... I forgot when he wrote the book, Vygotsky said exactly the same thing. He was talking about art and music as being a technique of emotions, so, as I said he mentions these things, but he never developed them. And then, I've developed that and there are interesting examples that come from anthropologists, they talk about how cultural concepts are really the mechanism of emotions, that cultural concepts form our interpretive schemas. And when that happens, we interpret the event through the cultural schemas. And that determines if we become angry or if we interpret as a joke or something. These are cultural schemas. And so, that's an interesting example of how the cultural factors are not external influences on us, I mean, they are, but they are not only that. They're actually the operating mechanism of psychology. And so, again, there is a very unusual perspective. Many people think that the operating mechanisms of psychology are personal, natural, cortical, hormonal, things like that. But I'm saying that the guidance of our psychological processes, what brings them into operation and determines their content is really these macro cultural factors. And finally, I'm just relating to the macro cultural level, I also identified the fact that psychological phenomena are functional for macro cultural factors. So, the macro cultural factors are the basis of them, but then in turn, psychology has a dialectical-reciprocal affect on culture by extending the culture and maintaining the culture. So, it's very interesting to think of the different ways psychological phenomena are political in a sense, because they're actually reinforcing the macro cultural system that formed them and one clear example is jealousy. If you're jealous, what does that mean? It means that you want either objects, or in some cases people, for yourself. I mean, that's what jealousy is, right? If you have a girlfriend and your girlfriend talks to another guy, you're jealous... that means you want her for yourself. It's private property. So, jealousy reinforces on the psychological level the whole existence of private ownership of things. And of course, if you're jealous about resources, it's the same thing. So, it's very interesting to think about how psychological phenomena actually have this political basis to them. And as you express yourself psychologically, you're expressing a social system. And Vygotsky said that. He has a quote where he says that the individual is the incarnation of the entire so-

cial system and he's talking more about the formation of psychology, but it's also interesting to think of the flipside and how psychology perpetuates this. And it's a very important point for social change, because as psychology becomes socialized by the macro cultural factors, and as they maintain that system, then it is very difficult to have social change, because our psychology is actually conservative. And I think that Bourdieu says exactly that with his concept of the habitus. It's a habit. It's ingrained dispositions. And so, if you want to change from an individualistic society to a more collective society, it's very difficult, because it's not just changing the external social institutions, and who administers them, and the principles, and the laws, but you have to change people's psychology. They're not used to that. They're not used to spending a lot of time talking and hammering out things. They're used to saying, if you're the boss, 'this is how I'm doing it' and the worker is used to saying 'ok, tell me what to do I'll do it', and that conservatism is bringing obstacles to social change. And that's something that I write about in my works on co-ops, because I study co-ops as an alternative and I found in my research that co-ops face a tremendous psychological problem of the habitus. And they don't deal with it at all. They talk about changing ownership and democratic elections and things, but they never talk about the individualistic habitus. And in my research I've seen that it really interferes. So, I think those are some important ways that macro cultural psychology extends Vygotsky and is certainly consistent with Vygotsky. And I think that there's this real lack of attention to this level even in the field of cultural psychology, which is very strange, because if cultural psychology means anything, it means studying the relation psychology to culture. But they never define culture in macro cultural terms, so they find other ways of dealing with culture. And so, I think this really fills a niche. One last thing about the politics of macro cultural psychology is that I think it is the only psychological theory that really leads directly to progressive social transformation. And the reason is that the whole idea is to relate psychological phenomena to macro cultural factors. So, the point is that you can see macro cultural factors in psychological phenomena. And therefore, any kinds of psychological problems will automatically be directly traced to macro cultural factors that are ultimately responsible for those problems. So that means that psychological improvement requires social change. Why? Because the psychological problems derive from macro cultural factors, because all psychological phenomena derive from those factors. So, this says that any kind of psychological problems or issues, such as mental illness, or deviance, or any social behavior, or loneliness, or alienation, or eating disorders, or crying, or any of those things have to be traced to broader macro cultural context to identify what's wrong at that level and then how can we change that level. And so I call macro cultural psychology an emancipatory psychological science. Because, I think that it's the only psychological science that brings macro culture into the field of psychology and calls for change on the broad social level. All other psychological theories methodologies try to reduce the relation between psychology

and macro cultural factors, which means that they reduce attention to the societal level and it means they reduce change in the cultural level, because they're saying that the cultural level is really not so important. Is not as important as I say it's important, so the less important it is, the less important it is to change, right? If it doesn't have much influence, then leave it alone. And that's why I think that macro cultural psychology is so relevant to the perspective of Brazilian psychologists and that's why I'm so happy to be here, to find such compatible views. I almost feel like I wrote this book for Brazilians. I think there is more sympathy for this perspective here than any place else I've seen. So, I really think that it's very important for social change movements, and it can provide an interesting psychological perspective for social change. Because everybody knows that we need to change social factors to reduce poverty, improve healthcare and all that, but very few people are talking about the need for social change in order to enrich people's psychological development. And so, macro cultural psychology and the psychological incentive for social change, which makes social change even more important and more necessary, because we're not just talking about material factors we're talking about the psychological and the spiritual factors of people too. So, that's one of the reasons I think this is an important perspective do develop and, of course, I've only initiated the development, but hopefully thousands of Brazilian friends can pursue it.

**Katia: What are the contributions cross cultural psychology may give to the understanding of similarities and differences in the expression of subjects in contemporaneity, like those movements, such as Occupy Wall Street, the Arab Spring, students' protests in Chile, and the recent demonstrations in Brazil, this year?**

C. Ratner: First of all, cross cultural psychology doesn't really get to the level of these kinds of political protests. I mean, the traditional way of doing cross cultural psychology confines itself to studying psychological issues. And there are comparisons of people's psychology in different societies, but they never talk about political movements. So, I think we may have to extend cross cultural psychology to macro cultural psychology and political psychology in order to make a comparison. But I don't think that the concepts and theories of cross cultural psychology really have any relevance to that. But if you want me to leave cross cultural psychology and talk more about how I see them in relation to macro cultural factors, I would be glad to do that. I think that all these movements. Let me try and frame it within macro cultural psychology. Macro cultural psychology says, like I was mentioning, that in order to understand psychology, in order to improve psychology, you have to understand the macro cultural influences on psychology. That requires a very concrete analysis, and that's one of the things I emphasize in macro cultural psychology. That it's necessary to understand cultural factors very concretely and not talk about them as interpersonal relations, but to talk about them historically,

what are their specific characteristics, what are the poetics involved in culture, who really controls cultural factors, who administers them, what are the interests of those people and what are the deficiencies of those macro cultural factors. And then, the point would be to understand how those concrete deficiencies and power structures involved; how those things could be changed. So, it seems to me that the macro cultural psychology calls for a concrete social analysis and a concrete political analysis in order to join the struggle for social change. But it seems to me that these liberatory, emancipatory movements that you've mentioned don't do that. And I certainly know that the Occupy movement didn't do that. These movements, from my understanding were very general and very unspecific. I mean, they were calling for democracy and justice and those kinds of things. I never heard any concrete analysis of the social systems that they were fighting against. It's certainly true in the case of Occupy. I mean, the only thing the Occupy movement ever said was to identify rich people and poor people, and say rich people correspond to 1% and the rest of the people to 99%. But that's not a social analysis. There was no analysis of why there's property or why there's exploitation or why there's pollution, or anything. I mean it was very general and it seems to me very, very superficial. They took the symptoms of all these problems and said 'we have to transform the symptoms', but they had no idea of the causes, and they had no agenda, they had no program, they had no specific analysis of what a viable alternative would be. I mean, the Occupy movement had nothing. All they did was, they went to a place, like they went to the stock exchange in New York City and they said 'we don't like this', you know... 'it's not fair, poor people should have more money, rich people should have less money'. But that's nothing. And you can see the results. The Occupy movement doesn't exist. All the Arab Spring that everybody was so enthusiastic about, look what happened. I mean, there's not one success in any of the countries. Every one of the countries where there's Arab Spring are worse now than before. And they all have autocratic governments or extremist governments and, actually, I was in Saudi Arabia when the Arab Spring erupted in Egypt and some of my friends said: 'oh, you know, we're really going to have a change' and I said you are not going to have a change, because I don't hear any concrete analysis of any cultural factor. It's all these general, abstract ideals. You don't have a movement, you don't have organization, and you don't have any strength. I mean, you just have a bunch of people saying 'were not happy'. And of course, it's nice to express your unhappiness, but in terms of a serious political movement for social change, I said at the time that there's just no hope for this. And now, it's just worse than before. And I think that what ties them all together is the lack of a macro cultural political analysis. They didn't have it. And without it you're doomed. And just to continue with that, I'm actually very disappointed with American social activists and leftists and socialists, because they all uncritically supported the Occupy movement. All of them, all of the well-known, eminent social critics in the US, they all said 'this is great', 'this is the beginning of real social change'. And it disappeared in the

US and it totally failed in the other countries, and not one of them has said 'gee, I guess we were wrong'. Not one of them has tried to analyze what went wrong, why they failed. Not one of them has changed their support for it, nobody has said 'well, I think we need a different kind of movement and all of this spontaneous stuff that we supported didn't work now we have to find something else'. There's been no re-analysis. So, I'm afraid that the next time, when the next recession hits in a couple of years in the US, the same thing is going to happen. People are going to, you know, be very unhappy and say 'we don't like the rich people' and all the same stuff, and nothing is going to happen again, because that's not what a political social movement does. I mean, that's not the way it can work. So, I think that's what ties them all together. And think that's why they all failed. Like I said, it doesn't have much to do with cross cultural psychology.

**Katia: In your book *Cooperation, Community and Co-ops in a Global Era*, you bring back Thomas Kuhn's concept of paradigm to say that it is important to create a new social paradigm based on cooperation to overcome individual and social crises and conflicts produced by the capitalist forms of organization and production. So, what does this paradigm consist of? And what's the role of formal and non-formal education in the creation of this paradigm?**

C. Ratner: Well, it's related to the question that we were just talking about. I started off the book by comparing economic systems to scientific paradigms and I said that the scientific paradigm is a coherent system of ideas. The basic ideas of sciences is that there is a small set of parsimonious, logically consistent principles that underlie a scientific system and that account for the great variety of individual phenomena that scientific theories are addressing, trying to understand. So, paradigm is this unified system of thought that's based on coherent, logically consistent principles and Kuhn said that these systems, trying to preserve themselves as systems, they're not a set of separated, isolated ideas. These are all logically integrated concepts that have the character of a Gestalt, you know, it's a whole, it's an entire entity. And the scientific system tries to preserve itself as such, it tries to say 'these basic principles are valid and they're going to account for all of these different things'. And then he said of course as times goes on, new scientific phenomena are discovered, new facts are discovered that are inconsistent with this paradigm. But paradigms are not open; they are not willing to say 'ok, here are some new facts, so let's just dissolve'. That's not how it works, the scientists try very hard to preserve the system even in the face of contradictions and he says they try to develop all kinds of auxiliary hypothesis – as he calls them – and say ok, well, these principles are basically ok, but we have to add a couple of little auxiliary principles to account for these couple of exceptions and they try to do that, but the exceptions grow and grow and grow, and eventually, they can't find enough of these auxiliary hypothesis to account for them within the framework of the existing

system and the existing parsimonious principles. So, he said, at that point the system becomes unworkable as a system. And the integrity of the system, the coherence of the system cannot be maintained because there are so many threats to it. And at that point, people come along and say 'ok, we have to develop a new coherent system that takes account for these new discrepant elements and develop a new system that is logically consistent and is a new Gestalt'. And I'm saying it's very analogous to economic systems, because economic systems, such as capitalism, function exactly as this scientific paradigm. Capitalism is a very coherent system, it's based on certain, on a small number of parsimonious, logical principles, which are clearly articulated and ordered to be maintained. And they're also extended. I mean now, it is very obvious that you know, liberalism is more and more extended, it's taking over education, medicine, even scientific research. All areas are becoming subject to this kind of... to neoliberal capitalist principles. But, obviously at the same time, there are contradictions and there are discrepant elements, we all know the massive crises that are happening and the defenders of the status quo do just like the scientists do. They say 'ok, we're going to make some adjustments, you know, raise some taxes or do something, we will shift investments', things like that, within the same system. And I'm saying it is perfectly obvious to any objective observer that that's impossible, that the crises are so extensive and so systemic and they keep increasing and there's no solution. Look at all the attempted solutions, the meetings of the IMF, the G-20, and everybody getting together and talking, there are climate change conferences and absolutely nothing is changing. So, I'm saying that it is an interesting analogy with the scientific theory that now it's time to form a new paradigm, a new Gestalt, a new social system that's based on different principles. So, that's the basic idea that I thought of for using Kuhn and the scientific paradigm in relation to social change. And I think it's related to the question we talked about with these changes, these revolts, with the Arab Spring, because, again, I think the biggest weakness about these social movements was that they had not paradigm. They had no alternative paradigm. It's like I said, there's no program, no analysis, no agenda. They had not organization even. You know, in the US people get together and just have meetings. People would come off the street and people would sit down and talk and say 'gee, I think we should do this, yeah, that's a good idea. Let's do this.' And, you can't possibly have a successful movement, they had no paradigm. And so, I think that that's one of the reasons... that's the main reason they failed. The Co-op movement does have a history of developing a new paradigm. And there are a small number of principles that guide the co-op movement and one of them is that there's no capitalism and no capitalist. That enterprises are owned and controlled by the individual members, either the workers who work there or, where I live for example, there's a food co-op where the community joins, each person pays 25 dollars and you get one share. And then the members vote for the Board of Directors that set the policies for the co-op. So, there is no such thing as a rich person who's controlling it. It's

one person, one vote. So, that's one of the basic principles and in the Occupy movement, it didn't even have that. They didn't even have a concept of anything like that. They just wanted fairness and justice. So, I was attracted to the Co-op movement because of that and also it has a lot of history, it started in the 1820s in England. So, these principles were practiced and they have managed to avoid the crises of capitalism. With the latest great recession, co-ops have survived very, very well. First, they didn't engage in any economic speculation, there were no bubbles, of course some of them lost costumers, because the rest of the world was collapsing, so people couldn't buy things from co-ops. So, some co-ops reduced their sales, they had to reduce their workforce and things like that, but they really managed to avoid the crises very, very well. What was the rest of the question?

**Katia: Contribution of formal and non formal education in this process.**

C. Ratner: I think that probably both are necessary. I think that's very important to have a well-developed theory and program like I keep saying and to have a well-developed paradigm. And to continually evaluate and assess the co-op principles to see how they're doing and to make changes when necessary. And I think that's all very formal. You have to... that's what I try to do in my book. I went to co-ops around the world and tried to see how they were practicing these principles and when they did practice the principles, and if they were successful. And in many cases I found that even when they practiced the principles, there were still a lot of problems, so I said that's ok, then, we have to redefine the paradigm. But I think that that kind of empirical and theoretical back and forth in very necessary. I don't think it can be done spontaneously. So, it needs a lot of study, it needs a lot of analysis. So, I think formal education is really important for developing a new paradigm. At the same time, we're in a brave new world and our analyses have to develop and there will many spontaneous events that happen in the course of developing co-ops. Sometimes people get ideas without a lot of study and a lot of analysis. It seems to me that we can make some improvements by doing this and that, and so let's try it. So, it seems to me that that's more informal, because you're not going back to the original works of Robert Owen or Karl Marx or something, but a lot of it develops through practice. But I think that even those informal lessons that develop through practice still have to be incorporated into a theory and also have to be analyzed by a theory. So, that is what I have to say about that.

**Katia: About your book, Vygotsky's Social-Political Psychology and its Contemporary Applications, which was published in Brazil in 1995, the question is: What re-appropriations of Vygotsky's theories could be made in the field of education today, indicating risks that a growing process of technicization of teaching brings to formative practices?**

C. Ratner: Well, first of all, I'm not an expert on education, but I would say that...I'd say a couple of things. One is, I think it's pretty straightforward to relate educational issues to the general approach that macro cultural psychology lays out. For example, in order to understand how education works and the principles of education and all of the procedures in education, I think that's clearly necessary to relate education to macro cultural factors, such as the political system. And in the United States, for example, if you want to understand education now, then, you have to look at that structure that the education system maintains, and I think you also have to look at the whole neoliberalization of education in the United States, which is again obviously the macro cultural level. All the things that happen in the classroom now are traceable to this neoliberal movement of the corporate class in the United States, and they're the ones that initiated the privatization of education and they're the ones that benefit from it and if you look at who directs the privatization of education, all of the big corporate names, like Bill Gates, are involved, and if you look at charter schools, which are a funny thing. I don't know if you have charter schools here, but charter schools are actually public schools, but they're new public schools and they're run by bodies that are not publicly elected, so public schools have a board of directors that are elected. I was on the board of directors of my local school for a while. But the charter schools very often are run by corporations and the number one sponsor of charter schools in the United States are hedge funds and investment companies, and they're doing this, you know, to make money. So, of course that's not the only force behind charter schools, but as I said it's the number one force, it's the biggest force. And it's all tied up with politics, the department of education. And so that's the level that you would have to look at to understand education in the United States. You can't just understand it as some kind of local interaction between teachers and students. So, that all comes from the macro cultural perspective. In addition, I think Vygotsky is useful for understanding education and changing it, because he answered in general objectives for education, where he wanted education to be somewhat more democratic than it is now and he wrote a book, *Psychology of Education*, for example, or I think it's called *Pedagogical Psychology*. And so he has general ideas about how children and teachers could interact in order to make learning more involved for the children. In that book, he also is very macro cultural in the sense that he talks about the impact of industrialization, the impact of capitalist education on the formation of students. And he's very critical of it. He says that the capitalist industrialization actually stunts the education of children. So, this is one of his most important macro cultural books, I think, because he's very direct and I think it's one of his most Marxist analyses, he actually employs Marxist critiques of capitalism. So, I think that he lends a lot of weight to resisting this kind of capitalist/technological/neoliberal market orientation, but of course, it was long before that, so he doesn't have anything really specific to say. So, I think that this is a case where it is necessary to extend Vygotsky and to go way beyond to think

of the points that he made. In any case I would bring in the importance of co-ops and co-op philosophy. The co-ops are more collective, they're democratic and so I would say that a viable alternative to the capitalist technicization of education would be to move in the direction of cooperative education for a cooperative society. And I guess the main point would be that I really don't think that much effective educational improvement can take place, at least in the United States, within the context of this massive neo liberal power. I mean, it's just enormous how effective they are. So, it seems to me that people have to start thinking of alternative social paradigms, like cooperation and co-ops, and to see and to develop an educational system that would prepare people to function in a more cooperative context and to work for a more cooperative context and I feel that way about really all social change now. I really don't think that's possible to have significant social reform within the existing social institutions, I mean people still hope for it, you know, and they say 'well, let's elect better people to Congress' or 'let's critique the neo-liberal policies within the American education system', but I think that the system is so powerful now and so unified that I really don't think that reforms can be made within the existing schools to a significant extent, I mean, of course there are always some possibilities, but it seems to me that what's necessary is for people to start to look for an alternative system and to start directing their attention away from reforming the existing system and developing a new system with new kinds of education and new kinds of inter-personal relations and new kinds of psychological phenomena. And in my book I say "it's time to stop bailing out the system and start bailing out from the system." Does that answer all the parts of the question?

**Katia: Yes, I think so. The last question: What are theoretical and methodological contributions macro cultural psychology can give to research in education and psychology?**

C. Ratner: Well, in general, I think it's necessary to have concrete macro cultural analyses of macro cultural factors, like I mentioned, in education, macro cultural psychology will certainly direct attention at the politics, the economics of the educational system: who controls it, what their interests are, who benefits from it. I think that's where you have to start, because I think that's where the educational system is born. You know, again, I think that the macro level is really the central level of culture, that it is the major level of culture... that's where things start. Most people think that macro culture is the result of accumulating personal interactions and it's like a bottom-up theory, but macro cultural psychology is more of a top-down theory. It says that it's necessary for people to develop social institutions and artifacts and concepts in order for them to survive. I mean that's what culture is all about. And at that level, then, things trickle down to the more micro level. So, in relation to education, I think I've already discussed how that would take place: understanding neoliberalism. Methodology is a little more involved question.

It's kind of hard to discuss right now, I mean, one thing to emphasize in methodology is that in order to understand the concrete cultural character of psychology and also of cultural factors, I think it's essential to use qualitative research methods. Because the cultural character is very subtle and kind of extends in these subtle and complex ways throughout psychological phenomena and throughout behavior and so in order to capture this sort of subtlety and complexity, I think you have to have an openness to see it in different forms and in different manifestations. But, I mean, obviously we can't discuss how that actually works, but I think that it requires a methodological sensitivity to politics and power and concrete cultural factors. And so, I think that's kind of the basis of macro cultural research methodology. Of course there are other details. You can certainly use simple kinds of measures and questionnaires to get specific, obvious kinds of things and I think that's necessary and it's interesting to work that out. But I don't think we can discuss it right here. So, what else was in that question?

**Katia: The contributions this approach (macro cultural psychology) can give to research, for example, carried out in Brazilian universities?**

C. Ratner: Well, I think the theoretical contributions are pretty clear. I think we've discussed them, so the only thing to add would be about methodology, which I think it is too involved to discuss right here. But as I said at the beginning, I found that Brazilian psychologists are very involved in this approach and I think what really drives Brazilian psychology is the very important concern for social improvement and the political direction... and I have the same direction. I mean, I am very concerned to develop cultural psychology as a valid science and that's something we haven't talked about. And naturally my goal is not just to say that macro cultural factors are important and leave it at that, it's really to develop this in a scientific way that actually explains the origins, and the characteristics and the functions of psychological phenomena. And in my books and my works I provide many examples, showing that this actually is very accurate, that this is actually the basis of understanding psychology.

So, I'm very concerned about the scientific aspect, but what really motivated me to develop the scientific aspect was its political implications, because I share the same political orientation that most of you do and it's very interesting how that political orientation led me and I think it leads Brazilians to also study the importance of macro cultural factors on psychology, because that makes psychology into a critical discipline that calls for social change. So, I think that there's a lot of commonality. But I haven't seen the development of cultural psychological theory in Brazil and I think that's a necessary addition. I find that it is very important, very valuable to have the political drive for social improvement, but it's also important to show how that can really lead to developing a valid basic psychological science and I haven't seen that developed in Brazil, but of course, I don't speak Portuguese and I've only been here for a couple of weeks, but all the people I talk to, they emphasize how important it is that our research contributes to social change, which I completely agree with, but as I said, I haven't seen theoretical development of a theory, such as Vygotsky's, that would explain how psychological phenomena are related in a system, and the big question is also why are psychological phenomena cultural? And I think in order to develop cultural psychology you have to ask that question and answer it, because that gets you into the question of what is the nature of human psychology? And I think we have to understand that there's this basic nature to human psychology, which allows it to be cultural and that's how it's different from animal psychology. So, I think these kinds of developments, asking the why questions: Why is psychology cultural? Why are macro cultural factors so important? And also cultural theory, I think there needs to be more development in cultural theory, exploring more what is the nature of macro cultural factors, why are macro cultural factors so important in culture? Why are they more important than other kinds of factors? So, I think that developing these more detailed questions and detailed aspects of cultural psychology will help Brazilian social psychology.

**Katia: Thank you very much for your generosity.**

**Translation Ratner**

**Márcia de Macedo**