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Macro Cultural Psychology, The Psychology of Oppression, and Cultural-Psychological Enrichment

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Principles of Macro Cultural Psychology

Approaches to cultural psychology rest upon their definition of culture. By definition of culture I mean both its content -- that is, what cultural factors consist of and which are most important for structuring social and psychological activity -- and also its form -- or how the factors are organized, whether as a sum or sequence of discrete variables or a structured, integral whole, as a set of equals or with certain ones being more central, as static givens or dialectically dynamic.

Macro cultural psychology construes culture as composed primarily of macro factors -- social institutions, artifacts, and cultural concepts.

The main principle of macro cultural psychology is that psychological phenomena such as perception, self, emotions, cognition, and mental illness are based on macro cultural factors, developed in macro cultural factors, publicly objectified in macro cultural factors, socialized by macro cultural factors, embody macro cultural factors, and function to sustain macro cultural factors. Macro cultural factors comprise the operating mechanism of the psyche. We think, perceive, feel through macro cultural factors. Macro cultural factors are the explanatory constructs, descriptors, and predictors of emotions, perception, cognition, memory, motivation, self, sexuality, mental illness, and developmental processes (Ratner, 2011a, 2011b).

Contrary to predominant thinking about psychology, psychology does not emanate from natural or personal processes internal to the individual. Culture determines that we think, perceive, remember, and emote (in human terms), as well as how we think, remember, emote, and perceive, and also what we think, remember, emote, and perceive. Macro culture is

the basis of abstract (essential) aspects of psychology and concrete aspects. Macro culture is our human nature.

Durkheim (1914/2005, pp. 35, 38, 42) put it well when he said, “society cannot constitute itself unless it penetrates individual consciousnesses and fashions them in its image and likeness.” “We cannot live without representing to ourselves the world around us and the objects of every sort that fill it. But by this alone, that we represent them to ourselves, they enter into us and thus become part of ourselves...Consequently, there is in us something other than ourselves to call up our activity.” “Ideas and sentiments developed by the community...move our will...” This is what I mean when I say that culture is the operating mechanism of the psyche.¹

Vygotsky similarly emphasized, “the structures of higher mental functions represent a cast of collective social relations between people. These [mental] structures are nothing other than a transfer into the personality of an inward relation of a social order that constitutes the basis of the social structure of the human personality” (Vygotsky, 1998, pp. 169-170, my emphasis). “Verbal thought is not an innate, natural form of behavior, but is determined by historical-cultural process and has specific properties and laws that cannot be found in the natural forms of thought and speech. Once we acknowledge the historical character of verbal thought, we must consider it subject to all the premises of historical materialism, which are valid for any historical phenomenon in human society. It is only to be expected that on this level the development of behavior will be governed essentially by the general laws of the historical development of human society” (Vygotsky 1986, pp. 94-95).

Durkheim emphasized a central point of macro cultural psychology, that society is not an extension of the individual, nor a sum of individuals. “Society has its own nature and consequently altogether different demands than those that are involved in our nature as an individual” (1914/2005, p. 44). Psychological phenomena are part of the macro cultural system and dynamics. Psychological phenomena construct cultural factors and are constructed by them.

Honor killings

An example of these points is honor killings among devout religious people: For choosing a lover outside of her Kurdish community and living with him, Fadime was brutally shot and killed by her father at point blank range in front of her mother and younger sister in 2002 in Sweden, at the age of 25. Her father shot her in the face as he shouted “you filthy whore.” The father felt no regret; he felt the killing assuaged the shame

that Fadime had brought upon him and his family (Wikan, 2008).²

Honor killings exemplify a complex of emotions, perceptions, reasoning, self-concept, and sexuality organized in cultural norms. These norms are represented by sexual honor. Sexual honor embodies and sustains a social system of proper male-female interactions and proper interactions between daughters and parents. Violating sexual norms violates the entire normative system of gender and familial relations which sexual honor represents. This is why it is so serious and why it must be corrected. Sexual honor is made serious by attributing it to an entire family, not to an individual. The siblings of a disgraced woman are disgraced and become unfit for marriage. This social construction of sexual honor gives family members a vested interest in preventing her disobedience against the entire social system.

Honor and shame are social constructs with socially specific and variable content. Wikan (p. 64) observes that honor takes on other forms/qualities in other societies. Some societies define honor as the value of a person in his own eyes. The Kurdish notion of honor practiced by Fadime's father was more collectivistic.

The emotional fury and murderous behavior directed at the miscreant daughter is organized by the social construct of honor, it incarnates the social construct, and it sustains and reinforces the social construct of honor. The emotional fury contains the code within itself as its operating mechanism. The code is what generates the fury at particular activities of the daughter in particular circumstances (when non-family members discover the tabooed behavior). The code is also what mandates particular behavioral responses to assuage the fury.

The fury bears the quality of the code. It is disgraced fury, not some other kind of fury. Fadime's father's fury was not related to jealousy or abuse, nor was it blind passion. It was a calculated response based upon knowledge that outsiders were aware of the daughter's disgraceful sexual behavior and the inability of the parents to control it.

Disgraced fury is nuanced differently from the fury a mother feels at her child who runs into the street without looking for approaching cars that might injure him. The latter fury is tinged with concern for the child's well-being, not family honor. The eliciting event, quality of the emotion, and resolving behavior form a unit or system in the two cases.

Macro cultural psychology does not regard fury as a neutral, natural, fixed, universal, independent process that becomes associated with -- conditioned to -- various events/stimuli in various conditions. Rather, we regard fury as specifically formed by macro cultural factors such as honor codes, in order to achieve specific cultural states. The same is true for love, memory, perception, and reasoning. Psychology is not generic, it is

culturally specific.

The cultural code was inside the psychology, modulating and organizing it; but psychology was also inside the code. The cultural norm of honor and dishonor regarding sexual behavior of daughters rested upon particular perceptions, emotions, sexuality, self-concept, self-control of impulses, reasoning. These psychological phenomena were the subjective element of the code.³

Wikan observes a principle of macro cultural psychology, namely, that the cultural concept of honor, which formed the basis of the family's psychology, is political. It incarnates, expresses, and promulgates a system of social practices which are political. Family honor rests upon submissive behavior by women that supports male dominance over a monogamous family. Honor is also ideological in that it purports to enshrine noble behavior, but it really enshrines submissive, oppressive, ignoble, dishonorable behavior by women that violates their humanity and dignity. Honor is additionally political in that it is defined by the ruling elite. "Those in power have waded into the European debate in an attempt to take charge of 'honor'" (Wikan, p. 68).

Since psychology is the subjective side (element) of macro cultural factors, it contained the politics of the honor code. The father's psychology (his emotional fury and shame) and behavior was a political act that sustained the subordinate position of women within the monogamous family. Women's psychology that conformed to the honor code was similarly political in that it reinforced their subordination.

Because psychology emanates from, embodies, and enables participation in macro cultural factors, we may say that psychology is a cultural state of being, a cultural state of mind, a cultural identity and membership. As Vygotsky and Durkheim emphasized in their statements cited earlier, psychology is not pure consciousness or subjectivity; psychology contains and expresses a social order.

Fadime's father's fury and shame at his daughter's "disgraceful" behavior placed him in a social position vis a vis his community, it testified to his membership in the community, it promulgated a wide range of social relations regarding daughters' social position vis a vis parents and young men.

Macro cultural psychology argues that the way that Fadime's father's psychology was constructed at the macro cultural level, objectified in macro cultural factors, organized by them, socialized by them, maintains them, and individuals to them exemplifies the cultural nature of all psychological phenomena.⁴

Macro cultural psychology argues that psychological phenomena are public, definite, objective, cultural tools/means whose form and

content are culturally organized to be suitable for achieving cultural purposes (see Lewis, 1989; Ratner 2011b for examples).

Because of this, subjectivity/psychology/agency binds the individual to the culture, and it also binds the culture together through shared individual behavior. Fadime's father's psychology is a telling example. This cultural function of psychology refutes the popular notion that psychology is essentially a personal construct. Psychology is a macro cultural factor that does cultural work.

The psychological phenomena we have discussed are only explicable in macro cultural terms. Reducing them to natural biological mechanisms, or individual personality processes, or personal-subjective choices and meanings cannot account for the cultural specificity of this psychology, its widespread prevalence throughout the culture, and its obvious dependence upon cultural codes and concepts.

Macro cultural psychology does not simply describe cultural differences in psychological expressions; it identifies the cultural operating mechanisms (mediational means) that generate (and explain) those expressions. This reveals culture in psychology, rather than psychology in culture.

Macro cultural psychology emphasizes the complexity of culture that is composed of different macro cultural factors with their own contents, processes, histories, vested interests, and position vis a vis other factors. Factory work is qualitatively different from family life. There are contradictions and interactions among these cultural factors. Each contributes differently to psychology. At the same time, there is an overarching unity to culture that holds it together and prevents it from becoming decimated by conflicting pressures. This unity stems from the predominant power of the political economy over other cultural factors. The political economy of capitalism dominates other institutions such as government, family, entertainment, sports, medicine, scientific research, news media, and religion. I propose that the social structure takes the form of a cone with political economy at the stem (Ratner, 2011, chap. 3; Williams, 1973; Pred, 1984; New York Times, Aug. 1, 2010 "The Academic-Industrial Complex").

Because psychology is formed in macro cultural factors, it is designed and controlled by whoever is in charge of those factors. Psychology is only as democratic as the culture in which it is formed.

Every society for the past 10,000 years has been structured in a pyramidal hierarchy in which the upper class has dominated the subaltern classes. The structure is only maintained by exploitation and oppression --

people would never voluntarily and rationally consent to it. “Inequality is produced by specific institutional mechanisms that are all variations on exploitation and ... discrimination...The contemporary political economy of the United States is riddled with categorical mechanisms that produce unequal distributions of material, symbolic, and emotional resources along the lines of race, class, and gender.” “Under capitalism, categorical mechanisms of inequality are often bult into the social organization of the market itself – they are embedded within its laws, regulations, conventions, understandings, and institutions, both formal and informal” (Massey, 2007, pp. xv-xvi, 36).

For example, in the last quarter of 2009 and throughout 2010, American businesses shed employees at a massive rate, and have extracted more productivity from the remaining employees (through lower wages) so that profit margins will reach 9% at the end of 2010, an all time record!” (N.Y. Times, July 26, 2010). From the fourth quarter of 2007 to the fourth quarter of 2009, real aggregate output in the U.S., as measured by the gross domestic product, fell by about 2.5 percent. But employers cut their payrolls by 6 percent. They threw out far more workers and hours than they lost output. At the end of the fourth quarter in 2008, corporate profits began to dramatically increase, growing by \$572 billion by the first quarter of 2010. Over that same time period, wage and salary payments fell by \$122 billion. That kind of disconnect had never been seen before in all the decades since World War II. Worker productivity has increased dramatically, but the workers themselves have seen no gains from their increased production. It has all gone to corporate profits. This is unprecedented in the postwar years. Executives are delighted with this ill-gotten bonanza. Charles D. McLane Jr. is the chief financial officer of Alcoa, which recently experienced a turnaround in profits and a 22 percent increase in revenue. He assured investors that his company was in no hurry to bring back 37,000 workers who were let go since 2008. “We’re not only holding head-count levels, but are also driving restructuring this quarter that will result in further reductions” (N.Y. Times, July 31, 2010, editorial).

According to the Internal Revenue Service, in 2005 the top 1% of income earners received more than twice as much income as everyone in the bottom 50% combined.

The primary function of the state is to enforce the dominance of the upper class over the subaltern classes. Most of the security apparatus designed by the state over the past quarter-century

is a political response, not to rising criminal insecurity, but to the diffuse social insecurity wrought by the fragmentation of wage labor and the shakeup of ethnic hierarchy. The punitive slant of recent shifts in both welfare and justice policies points to a broader reconstruction of the state coupling restrictive “workfare” and expansive “prisonfare” under a philosophy of moral behaviorism. The paternalist penalization of poverty aims to contain the urban disorders spawned by economic deregulation and to discipline the precarious fractions of the postindustrial working class. Diligent and belligerent programs of “law and order” entailing the enlargement and exaltation of the police, the courts, and the penitentiary have also spread across the First world because they enable political elites to reassert the authority of the state and shore up the deficit of legitimacy officials suffer... (Wacquant, 2010, p. 198).

The U.S. class structure has become more pyramidal and oppressive over recent decades (Massey, 2007, p. xvi). This class and state domination extends to the subjective psychological elements of this social structure. E.g., the “Index of Social Health of the United States” provides a composite measure of social health or well-being. Based on a scale of 100, it declined from 69.6 in 1973 to 53.2 in 2005, a drop of 23.6 percent (Wisman & Capehart, 2010, p. 951).

The psychological effects of oppression must therefore be a central topic for comprehending concrete cultural psychology.

The Psychology of Oppression

Conditions of oppression and the psychology of oppression are mutually dependent and reinforcing, just as social conditions and psychology always are. Oppressive conditions limit people’s creativity, understanding, and control over their social life. Conversely, oppressed psychology maintains people in a subservient social position and therefore reinforces the oppressive conditions.

Psychology is active subjectivity that embodies macro cultural factors. Subjectivity in an oppressive society actively embodies oppression and it activates oppressed behavior. Activating oppressed behavior is an oppressive act. Consequently, oppressed psychology is

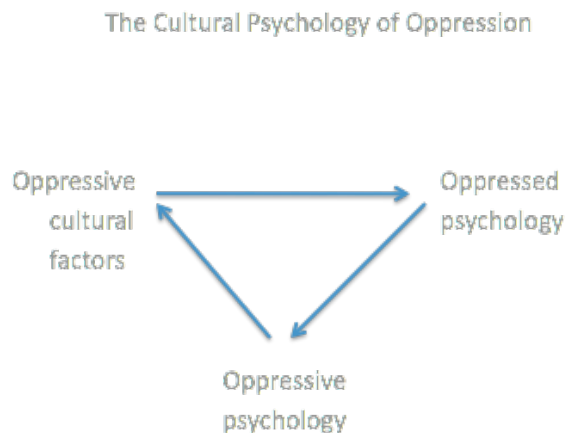
oppressive psychology.

Oppression works from within the psyche, as well as from outside. The mind is an agent of oppression just as much as external cultural factors are. People oppress themselves through their own oppressed subjectivities. This “learned helplessness” is the concrete manifestation of Durkheim’s remark that “society cannot constitute itself unless it penetrates individual consciousnesses and fashions them in its image and likeness.”

Psychology does cultural work just as institutions, artifacts, and cultural concepts do. "Durable embodied cognitive schemes, acquired by children in class environments, are a principal cause of observed class variation in educational performance" (Nash, 2003, p. 174). In this way, psychology is a macro cultural factor.

Figure 1 depicts the dynamic of the psychology of oppression.

Figure 1



The psychology of oppression is a serious psychological issue that limits people’s self-understanding, social understanding, critical faculty, and imagination of substantive alternatives to the status quo. An

illustrative example is the manner in which segregation persists in the spontaneous, personal behavior of individuals, long after official segregation has been prohibited. Since discrimination deprives both groups of valuable human relationships with the other group it is a psychology of oppression that illuminates key aspects of this phenomenon.

Racial psychology

Thomas (2005) empirically researched this issue in a South Carolina high school. of how high school students promulgate racial segregation. Thomas began with a perspective congruent with macro cultural psychology. She sought to investigate ways in which “race endures through the everyday practices of subjects...Race is enacted through the symbolic, psychic, and social activities of subjects.” “This performative process occurs in a social field of power that conditions a subject’s practice and agency” (pp. 1233, 1234). “Performativity is impelled by the demands of powerful social normativity” (p. 1240). This echoes my statement that oppressed psychology is oppressive psychology.

Thomas corrects the conventional theory of performance that construes it as a free act of self-expression (cf. Pred, 1984; Ratner, 2011 chapter six for additional critiques). She echoes Bourdieu’s notion of a habitus that is a set of creative tendencies which reproduce politically charged macro cultural factors. Agency is cultural agency.

Thomas discovered an important point about the subjects’ cultural agency: it was unaware of its cultural basis, characteristics, and function. The subjects misinterpreted their own subjectivity and behavior. They construed their subjectivity and behavior as free constructions that expressed their own personal desires. They acted in these ways because “they wanted to,” “that is how they felt comfortable.” The students did not realize that their desires were culturally conditioned habitus.

The students stated that their school was a happy family where anybody could sit next to anyone they choose during lunch in the cafeteria. In fact, however, seating arrangements -- spatiality -- were thoroughly segregated. The students perceived this but attributed it to free choice and comfort levels, not to any sociostructural factors such as macro cultural practices and values beyond the lunchroom.

When Thomas directly asked a white girl about the obvious racial segregation of seating arrangements during lunch, she hazily replied, “Blacks usually hang out together, and like whites hang out together, but we...you know.” “I don’t know, maybe I, maybe that’s how they’re more comfortable. But it’s not like, oh, ‘we don’t like you’ or you know?” (pp, 1237-1238).

Thomas criticizes these self-interpretations as inadequate for failing to comprehend the social structuring of their behavior: “Their words of harmony in the lunchroom, of the ways its segregated space ‘doesn’t matter’ cannot be taken for granted” (p. 1241).

Commenting on one white girl’s account, Thomas says, “She establishes her practices of race as nonracist, and even as non-racial, although her spatial practices at lunch produce the space of separation...She construes herself as a subject who is able to travel across racial boundaries as she chooses” (p. 1238).

A black girl, Bryana, manifested the same lack of understand as her white classmate: “I really do not understand why black people sit by all the black kids in the cafeteria because that’s just something we do” (p. 1239). This is a telling statement about the psychology of oppression; for it reveals that people do not understand the reasons for their own oppressed and oppressive behavior.

Thomas explains this: “The students accept and reinforce the social boundaries and produce the differentiations of racial and gendered categories, though they may be confounded by the invisible power that guides their lunchroom spatial practices -- and despite the fact that they articulate sense of choice in the matter.” “These reincarnations [of racial and gendered categories] remain often unnoticed, unanalyzed, and unapproachable to the subjects themselves.” Thomas “explores racial boundaries and shows how girls enforce racial difference at school despite their idealization of school as a racially mobile space” (p. 1241).

Thomas observes that the subjects “seek to explain the [segregated] spatial practice in their own time and place as their practice. However, as their everyday practice of sitting down in same race groups reproduces the space and continues racial segregation, the girls embody and repeat the norm of segregated seating” (p. 1239).⁵

Given the functional importance of spatial segregation for broader social stratification, “This spatiality cannot be imagined as simply a result of girls’ agency, nor, despite the girls’ language, as a result of their choice and action (for example, as something they ‘do’).” “Girls...come to accept, repeat, and embody racialization by invoking normative racial identities and recreating racial symbolism” (Thomas, 2005, p. 1241, my emphasis, p. 1246). The agency that students display is cultural agency, not individual agency.

Students enacted racial segregation in areas where they were not directed to by immediate external cultural factors. This is what makes it the psychology of oppression. It has become the students’ own agency which they then implement as agents of oppression against each other and against themselves. Alexander & Tredoux (2010, p. 370) found the

same thing in their study of segregation in informal, interpersonal spaces:

Informal spaces are possibly more amenable to segregation simply because individuals are able to choose who they wish to interact with, without concern for official monitoring or sanctions... However, racial divisions in space may emerge even in more formal or structured settings such as a classroom or lecture theatre, provided that individuals are able to exercise a certain degree of choice in their use and occupation of a given space. Haber conducted a study of lecture theatres at a university in the United States and observed that, when given enough seating choice (more than one seat available for every student), dominant (White Anglo-Saxon) and marginal (Blacks and other ethnic minorities) students placed themselves more often on the spatial center and periphery of the classroom, respectively. Their particular locations were not only structured by the differential social status and broader power relations between the two groups, but simultaneously reflected students' understandings of their "proper place" within the classroom setting. Thus, broader social relations and localized spatial configurations may be mutually reinforcing.

Alexander and Tredoux (2010, p. 381) found that seating patterns in S. African tutorial classrooms were significantly segregated even in the absence of pressure to do so by the educational system, per se. 71% of Black students would have to change seats within classrooms to achieve an integrated seating pattern. "Overall, these findings suggest that the probability of interracial contact occurring in psychology tutorial classrooms is very low."

The same situation exists in elite American universities. Espenshade & Radford demonstrate the myriad threads of class and racial distinctions which permeate admission to elite universities, and campus life within them. They found that "The odds that black students socialize or very often with white students are just 14% of the odds that white students socialize this frequently with other whites." "On average, nonwhite students are 31% as likely to interact socially with white students as whites are to mix and mingle among themselves." "Non black students are just 16% as likely as black students to interact with other blacks." "Black students have 621% greater odds and white students has 481% higher odds of having social relations with coethnics than with non-

coethnics" (Espenshade & Radford (2009, pp. 214, 215). Thus, being together in university does not necessarily generate a coming together to overcome segregation. Taking a course about one's own ethnic group is negatively related to interacting with members of other ethnic groups (ibid., p. 194). Finally, racial segregation is organized by social class. The higher a student's social class background, the less likely he or she is to have substantial social relations with a student from a different racial or ethnic background. Lower class students are generally just 1 percentage points more likely to interact with a same-race student than with an other-race student, 27 percentage points for working class students, 37 for middle class students, and 43 for upper middle class and 44 percentage points for upper class students (ibid., p. 190).

These findings demonstrate that racism is embedded in children's consciousness and is manifested when their consciousness is given free reign in unregulated, protected, interpersonal interactions. The children themselves promulgate racial segregation in their choices of companions. They did not resist segregation by developing alternative personal meanings. They did not even realize the segregationist character of their subjectivity/agency. Giving individuals reign to express their desires, paradoxically gives reign to predominant cultural motives which comprise their habituses. Mere co-presence (contact) of groups in a space does not facilitate intercourse because the unrestricted physical space is overlain by social distinctions which divide the space (Erasmus, 2010; Dixon, Tredoux, Clack, 2005, pp. 404-405).

Alexander and Tredoux (2010, p. 384) said it well: "The fact that classrooms were significantly segregated in our study at the very first tutorial [with first year students], when students were relatively unfamiliar with both the space and its occupants, provides support for the argument that, even where pre-established norms do not exist, groups will seek to reestablish and reproduce the prevailing social order through the racialization of space...Even in desegregated contexts, opportunities for contact may be thwarted by informal practices that reproduce group boundaries."

Thomas and Alexander & Tredoux recognize that, while public universities prohibit discrimination on their premises, unnoticed social relations foster it. Racial segregation throughout society is a macro model that affects students' racial thinking and behavior. The U.S. today is as racially segregated in housing and neighborhoods as it was before civil rights legislation was passed.

The 1990 census shows that 30% of African Americans lived in neighborhoods which were 90% or more black, while the remaining

percentage of African Americans still lived in predominantly black areas. In fact, 62% of African Americans lived in areas that were at least 60% black. While 86% of suburban whites, on the other hand, lived in communities that were less than 1% black.

Housing segregation produces educational segregation in neighborhood schools. In 1997, nationwide, nearly 70 percent of African American students and 75 percent of Latino students attended predominantly minority schools. More than one-third of the students in each group were in schools where 90 percent or more of their classmates are minorities. Meanwhile, the average white student was enrolled in a school where more than eight in 10 of his or her classmates also are white.

Within schools, teachers treat ethnic groups differently despite formal prohibitions against this (Panofsky, 2003). Teachers of first-grade pupils respond differently to equivalent reading errors depending upon whether pupils are white and middle class or black and working class. Children were treated in ways that perpetuated stereotypical psychological (cognitive, emotional, motivational) and interpersonal activities associated with the different classes. In this case, teachers focused on the social aspects of students' responses rather than the technical aspects of their reading competence (which were equivalent). Teachers' responses to students' technical reading competence were colored by their social features. Teachers used reading not simply to teach neutral, technical aspects of reading, but as a means to socialize class-appropriate psychological competencies. Psychology becomes a mechanism of social control (Panofsky, 2003, p. 423).

These conditions – along with racial differences in poverty and employment -- give children a sense of social differences which carry over into their interpersonal interactions.

In addition, enduring social divisions promote psychological and behavioral differences in the groups (see Portes & Vadeboncoeur, 2003) which make interactions difficult in free spaces. Interpersonal relations are not outside culture, they are deeply embedded within it.

Dixon, Tredoux, Clack, (2005, p. 409) explain, "If the micro-ecology of segregation constitutes a sui generis level of reality, this does not mean that this reality is autonomous from processes operating at other spatial scales. Clearly, the patterning of face-to-face interaction within a given setting is invariably structured by wider political, economic and historical factors." Massey (2007, p. 7) concurs: "Social relations and day-to-day behaviors at the microsocial level become oriented toward ranked categories, so that decisions about who to befriend, who to help, who to share with, who to live near, who to court, and who to marry are

made in ways that assume the existence and importance of asymmetric social categories.”

“The apparent banality of everyday spatial practices should not disguise their political resonance.” “Notwithstanding the official demise of petty apartheid, social relations continue to conform to a supposedly defunct logic of (racial) hierarchy, division and withdrawal” (Dixon, Tredoux, Clack, 2005, pp. 407, 408, my emphasis). Elucidating “how the endless dialectic between practice and social structure expresses itself locally... clarifies how individual practices of boundary regulation are both enabled by broader systems of segregation and the means whereby such systems are reproduced or transformed” (ibid., p. 403).

This research indicates that even when individuals are granted a space within culture that is freed from direct pressure to behave in a certain way (e.g., in schools and beaches that do not mandate segregation from other groups), individuals continue to behave in ways that they have learned from broader, distal conditions. The psychology of oppression is so ingrained in consciousness that it cannot readily be repudiated even when given somewhat of a chance.

Contrary to popular thinking, broad, encompassing, difficult-to-discern (and pin down) macro cultural factors are more influential on psychology than immediate, proximal circumscribed conditions. Direct efforts to alter immediate, proximal situations are less effective than changes to broad macro cultural factors – which are, unfortunately, more difficult to alter. The easier the changes, the less effective they are (Ratner, 1991, chap. 4, p. 287).

Personal meanings

Macro cultural psychology acknowledges that within shared cultural meanings necessary for social coherence and for individual participation in culture, individuals also develop personal modulations, or senses, of psychology. Individual students will practice segregation more or less intensely depending upon their backgrounds. Individual Muslims will practice the honor code more or less strictly, as well. These personal modulations are generally slight variations in the cultural norms (Ratner, 2002, p. 93). They do not subvert norms. That is clearly the lesson of the students’ interpersonal interactions in school cafeterias. Cultural coherence – and the advantages it offers to people -- requires that personal idiosyncracies function within the parameters of macro cultural requirements. Personal idiosyncracies cannot be allowed to subvert this.

Consequently, the way to transform culture is through developing a new social organization that provides a cultural coherence to individuals.

Reformulating Psychological Constructs in Accordance with Psychology of Oppression

The psychology of oppression indicates that social processes which organize psychology may stultify psychology. This requires that we reconsider concepts such as “zone of proximal development,” agency, and activity, as agents of oppression. Psychological constructs must reflect real, concrete, cultural content of psychological phenomena.

It is wrong to accuse macro cultural psychology of overlooking agency in emphasizing macro cultural factors. I have emphasized the active subjectivity of people in conducting honor killings, segregation, etc. Macro cultural psychology criticizes oppressed and oppressing agency; it does not deny agency. The criticism is meant to enhance genuine agency.

The Cultural Psychology of Liberation

The psychology of oppression problematizes social reform and psychological improvement. For the psychology of oppression limits people’s intellectual and psychological resources that are available to make changes (Lukes, 2005). Consequently, current subjectivity/psychology is not a reliable guide to understanding and improving itself or society.

Oppressed people may endorse fascism; lynch Negroes; blame immigrants for social problems; endorse religious mysticism (see Ratner, 2009a for discussion). A troubling example of indigenous people being complicit in their psychology of oppression is a tribal Saudi Arabian woman who recently had her husband arrested because he lifted her veil to see her face. They had been married 35 years, had 6 children, and he had never seen his wife’s face. She had so internalized the depersonalization of women in her tribal society that she prosecuted her husband for trying to circumvent it. She actively opposed her husband’s effort to establish a more personal, sensual relationship.

In his revolutionary work, Mao Zedung worried about the culturally-based backward thinking among the Chinese peasantry with whom he worked for decades. He said: “given the various kinds of deep-rooted feudal relationships in the countryside, it will not be an easy task to raise the class-consciousness of the peasants to the extent that they all realize that, in the end, it will be essential to eliminate the feudal remnants” (cited in Knight, 2007, p. 98).

Wikan (2008, p. 68) emphasizes the relation between oppression and

conservative thinking/action: “because the Kurds have been an oppressed and stateless people, the consequence has been that, at home and in exile, they cling to old traditions which include clan mentality and violence against women” (see also Frank, 2005).

When oppressed people take power from their oppressors, as has happened in many African countries, the new social order is often as bad as the old one. Thus, “Fanon hammers away at the inadequacy of national consciousness for it is at the very moment that the victory of colonialism seems to be won that a more serious problem appears—an exploitation that wears a black face” (Gibson, 2005, p. 91; Gibson, 2011).

Because subjectivity has become oppressed, it does not necessarily comprehend itself or society. Subjectivity utilizes cultural concepts to understand itself, and when these mediational means are mystified, they distort people’s self-understanding. The students in the segregation studies did not comprehend the significance and origins of their own behavior. Nor do most people thoroughly comprehend their own society because they utilize mystified cultural concepts to understand it.

Recent interviews with high school girls in Los Angeles after a racial conflict reveal the sadly limited understanding and suggestions that these participants had (Thomas, 2008, p. 2869, 2875). A question was put to all of the girls: What do you think the school should do to prevent future violence?

Nane: “They should just tell us every day, like, encouraging words or something. Have more events where we could all, like, get into.”

Grisselle: “There shouldn't be fights against race because we're all people, we all have feelings, we all [share] stuff. It's just stupid.”

Interviewer: “So why does it happen then? What do you think?”

Grisselle: “I guess the people who are in the fight are not understanding.”

Anne: “They just think it's cool, oh, ‘we're like fighting’, you know, ‘in a riot’.”

Alexis: “So it's just sad how closed minded they are.”

Chibi-Kim: “We're all the same [...]. I think it's very stupid.”

Zelda: “Why can't they like, set their animosities aside and just like, harmonize.”

Chibi-Kim: “Peace.”

Thomas (2008, pp. 2876-2877) identifies the limited understanding of self and society that these statements express: “The girls deny and disavow their own racism and racialization by proclaiming multicultural ideals and highlighting the good and essential sameness of humanity. By articulating so clearly their commitments to multiculturalism, they likewise

perform the liberal move of eschewing difference, and even violence, and focusing on individual rights and justice. “A confined focus on the self, I argue, is done at the expense of asking difficult questions of what processes racialized identifications and racist practice entail for the subject, such as how racist practice and resentment might be as heartfelt as peace to subjects.”

These examples of oppressed/oppressive psychology generate little confidence that social and psychological improvement can spring from ordinary subjectivity. Social and psychological improvement require an external, objective, scientific perspective that overcomes the limitations of mystified beliefs. (As an American bumper sticker advises: “Don’t believe what you think.”)

Macro cultural psychology engages in this kind of analysis. It elucidates the political economics of oppression and liberation – i.e., whose interests were instrumental in founding and maintaining cultural and psychological factors; how these interests may form an oppressive social system that runs counter to the real interests and fulfillment of the populace; what the structural mechanisms are that promote exploitation, class society, the psychology of oppression; and what viable alternative social organization of cultural and psychological factors would eliminate these evils. Because the political economy is the dominant, core macro cultural factor that radiates throughout the others to one extent or another, significant social change requires changing the political economic core of society (Ratner, 2009b; Ratner, 2011, chap. 7).⁶

Macro cultural psychology (consistent with historical materialism, as Vygotsky said) – which maintains that consciousness follows historical developments in macro cultural factors -- is not simply an intellectual (scientific) doctrine about consciousness; it is also a political doctrine about the need for political transformation. For the scientific fact that psychology is stunted by deleterious social conditions is also a political fact that people are oppressed by their social system. And the scientific implication that psychological improvement demands humanizing social conditions is also a political implication that the status quo must be politically restructured.

Vygotsky made this argument, himself. He says that capitalism impedes psychological fulfillment: “the source of the degradation of the personality [lies] in the capitalist form of manufacturing.” Vygotsky links psychological fulfillment to social change. He says the contradictions of capitalist political economy are “being resolved by the socialist revolution...Alongside this process, a change in the human personality and an alteration of man himself must inevitably take place (Vygotsky, 1994, pp. 180, 181).

Vygotsky is proposing an external, objective, social solution to psychological problems. He is not reporting on people's subjective opinion about what should be done.

Macro cultural psychology uses social critique to work on the political level to change macro cultural factors, and also on the personal level to help people understand and circumvent their culture's deleterious psychological and social effects. On the personal level (in schools, in therapy) we would remediate existing forms of agency/consciousness with substantially different cultural values and practices drawn from an objective macro cultural psychological analysis. E.g., we would suggest to the students who practice segregation that their behavior is far more than personal preference for in-group members. Their behavior stems from and recapitulates racial practices in macro cultural factors. They need to understand these factors and their affects on their psychology, and then systematically repudiate these affects and the formative macro cultural factors. They can do this on a personal/psychological level, and also on the political level. In this case, we are helping to alter the subjects' consciousness through a social critique. We do not accept their cultural psychology as is. We believe that the students will not significantly change their segregationist psychology/behavior unless they understand its cultural origins and devote attention to critiquing and circumventing these.

When Marx spoke of a working class perspective as the guide for social change, he was not referring to contemporary outlooks by workers. He was referring to an objective, theoretical perspective that had workers' interests at its core. It was a perspective that comprehended the political economic basis of the exploitation of workers, and the need for a new socialist political economy that would realize their material and psychological interests. The working class does not have this deep understanding simply by virtue of being oppressed. The working class perspective is not the perspective of the working class as currently constituted.

Other Psychological Approaches to Enriching Psychology

Other psychological approaches seek to enrich society and psychology without substantively transforming macro cultural factors and people's cultural consciousness. Three approaches are prominent.

"Agency theory"

It is common to extol agency as an intrinsically liberatory aspect of

human subjectivity/psychology.

A recent example is Skandrani, et al.'s (2010) enthusiasm that "Oppressed populations defended their traditions as a means of resisting French or British colonial power." Algerian women "used the veil as a means to express their agency and subjectivity" (p. 303). "In this interethnic game, Maghrebine migrants eventually appropriated the 'Maghrebine' trait, interiorized it, revalorized it and claimed it as a positive emblem of their identity" (p. 304).

The authors also extol the Indian practice of sati, in which a widow immolates herself on her husband's funeral pyre: "in India, the practice of sati became a symbol of the nationalist and anti-colonial movement, a symbol of resistance against the British colonial power" (p. 304).

The fact that victims of colonialism assert a custom is valorized as active, intentional self-expression, empowerment and resistance to society – even when the custom leads to their death. Simply engaging in action is valorized abstractly without any consideration of its cultural content or even the lethal affects on the practitioner. I identify this point of view as "agency theory."

Veils and head scarves are used in Islam to ensconce women from social participation and personal expression under the myth that veils and scarves hide women from Satan. Before we exalt the wearing veils and scarves by Muslim girls as innovative, transformative agency, we must be sure that they repudiate their oppressive cultural signification and behavioral effects. We would have to be sure that the girls instead use them for personal enhancement during social participation rather than a restriction on their behavior.

However, it is not clear that they did this. According to the description, the women identified with indigenous cultural practices and subjectively invested them with the significance of resistance. But this may simply be a subjective inversion of significance rather than extirpating the oppressive aspects of the indigenous practices. Indian women, for example, continued to die from the oppressive aspects of their indigenous practice of sati, which makes their subjective inversion of sati from colonialist oppression to resisting colonialism purely illusory.

Stubbornly reclaiming oppression as one's own liberation is a psychology of oppression. This can be seen in all sorts of prideful, self-destructive behaviors. The Saudi woman who defended her depersonalization against her husband's efforts to pierce it is a case in point. Obese women proclaim that "fat is beautiful." Indians living near the Ganges River believe the river is blessed by god, and they throw dead animals and people into it, thus polluting it and sickening people who drink and bath in it. They resist efforts of "outside experts" who implore them

to stop this self-destructive indigenous behavior. Many deaf people identify with their disability and refuse to overcome it by inserting cochlear implants that could significantly expand their fulfillment – e.g., by hearing Mozart’s music. Reclaiming and holding debilitating practices as one’s own, is ethnocentric thinking which refuses to accept the debilitating reality of one’s behavior.

It is akin to American consumerism which is financially and psychologically oppressive but which is adopted by consumers as their own way of feeling happy, attractive, confident, self-expressive, self-fulfilled, and even natural.

Given this mystification, an external, objective analysis of culture and psychology is necessary to disclose the fact that subjective feelings of satisfaction are culturally organized, conformist, and disempowering.

This point is evident in another example from Skandrani, et al. They glorify the ways that Muslim girls in France reconcile sexual mores of Islam with those of France. These girls maintain the letter of the law of virginity while simultaneously engaging in sexual acts other than vaginal intercourse (p. 308). “Rather than passive victims of a rigid norm of virginity, these young women show themselves to be creative agents, capable of appropriating and reinterpreting cultural proscriptions to their own ends.” (p. 312). “All of the interviewees used creative and original strategies to defend their position regarding the norm of virginity” (p. 307).

This interpretation overlooks the cultural constraints on the girls’ behavior and makes it appear to be a free, personal choice. A macro cultural psychological analysis reveals that the girls’ sexuality was buffeted by two contradictory cultures. Their agency simply played off one against the other, undoubtedly at great psychological cost. (It is not easy to satisfy two different masters.) The girls applied French sexual norms to find loopholes in Islamic law. While this requires some dexterity, it hardly qualifies as a creative, original strategy, or social reform.⁷

In fact, their sexual compromise leaves them subservient to an irrational, autocratic, oppressive religious sexual prohibition against intercourse. This should be renounced entirely, not used as an anchor that must be appeased through compromise. Their compromise neither liberates them (psychologically or sexually) nor transforms their oppressive culture. The girls’ agency is limited to working within the systems.

“Agency theory” decontextualizes agency from its cultural origins, characteristics, and function. This scientific distortion is based upon fallacious individualistic politics that seeks to free the individual from social pressures rather than transform the pressures.

However, pretending that oppressed people are liberated compounds their oppression because it overlooks behavior, psychology, and macro cultural factors that truncate agency and which must be changed in order to achieve true creativity, liberation, and social change.

Psychological enrichment requires keen societal awareness of the political origins and consequences of customs. It also requires political activity that challenges the macro cultural constituents of psychology and replaces them with humanized macro cultural factors, as Vygotsky insisted.

From this it follows that personal growth and social change both require dispelling the myth that agency is an individual phenomenon which produces social and personal change on the micro, mundane, individual level. Dispelling individual agency does not negate agency, per se; it dispels truncated, alienated agency that is confined to operating within the status quo and is oblivious to real social and psychological transformation necessary for genuine agency. In other words, dispelling personal, subjective agency actually enhances agency by acknowledging and improving its cultural constituents. As Adorno (2006, p. 203) put it, “we must abandon the illusion that freedom is a reality so as to salvage the possibility that freedom might one day become a reality after all.”⁸

Macro cultural psychology speaks to the level of analysis that is necessary to enrich psychology and society. Individuals and small groups certainly initiate this enrichment. However, in order to effectively enrich psychology and society, the pioneers of social change need to be cognizant of macro cultural factors and challenge their concrete social organization.

Indigenous people can utilize this perspective as a general guide for analyzing their particular conditions; they may also refine the general theory and methodology. However, indigenous ideas and practices are too limited (despite their good intentions) to displace the general theory and methodology of macro cultural psychology.

Labeling theory

One form of the foregoing liberation psychology is known as labeling theory. It argues that oppression consists of a dominant power labeling subaltern culture and psychology as deficient. If the labels were removed, then subaltern people would be recognized as capable.

While it is true that the dominant class does stigmatize subaltern groups, it also rules by materially and psychologically oppressing lower classes. Oppression is real, it is not merely symbolic and linguistic.

Oppression does not end by removing pejorative labels and recognizing the true capability of oppressed people. Labeling theory

minimizes oppression by converting it into a linguistic phenomenon or an attitude.

Labeling theory romanticizes oppressed people by insisting that they are capable despite their oppression. The solution is to accept them as they are. But, since people are truly oppressed, their cultures and psychology are oppressed and oppressing. Oppressed culture and psychology are obstacles to liberation which must be overcome, not idealized.

Diversity

Labeling theory is an element in the philosophy of diversity. Diversity insists that ethnic groups be respected because their distinctive customs broaden the aggregate experiences of a society. The quantitative breadth of experience is deemed to be beneficial and this requires respecting different customs. Stigmatizing a group denies the value of its distinctive customs and reduces the breadth of social customs.

Diversity is an abstraction. It privileges the number of customs over their content. Multiculturalists do not critically examine the politics behind cultural customs. For instance, they do not examine the autocratic leadership structure of the Catholic Church which is not elected by church members. They do not examine the system of slavery that was practiced in Tibetan Buddhist temples under the rule of the Dalai Lama. Nor do multiculturalists critique devout religiosity which subjects people to autocratic, oppressive, mythical, irrational, mystifying religious dogma. Multiculturalists treat cultural practices as quaint, unique customs divorced from their institutional, structural base and from their political content. Oppressive, irrational, mystifying customs are encouraged and accommodated, as in the case of Muslim girls wearing hoods and scarves, and fundamentalist Christian girls wearing skirts and not pants, and the belief that Jesus is watching your behavior, and the belief that your current status in life reincarnates your behavior in a previous life. Religious prohibitions against sex education, sexual activity, birth control, and abortion are also happily accepted as interesting, diverse perspectives which can teach us about the world. (The only exception being physical mutilation.)

Identifying a practice as cultural, spiritual, or religious commands respect for it, and exempts it from evaluation: "How dare you question a person's deeply held spiritual belief that gives meaning to her world?" Critical evaluation is denounced as intolerant.⁹ Skandrani, et al. (p. 304) make this claim. In this way, "culturalism" and multiculturalism may obscure oppression and implicitly condone it. What begins as abstract acceptance of behavior in general winds up

accepting concrete cultural forms which are often oppressive.

If existing forms of agency are acceptable, there is no need for social reform. Society must already be positive in allowing ethnic agency to flourish. Applauding extant subjectivity is conservative politics because it (implicitly) applauds the status quo that generates it. The focus is on enabling marginalized people to express their voice (which presumes they already have one), not on transforming conditions to give people a voice in controlling their society.

Diversity theory also militates against social critique and transformation in the way it treats the psychology of out-group people. Diversity theory suggests that out-group individuals become more tolerant or accepting of in-group behavior. Prejudice and intolerance are chastised. However, no change in social structure or political economy is proposed to stimulate and support this kind of psychological change. Multiculturalists only press for increased opportunities for social contact in the belief that mere contact will foster tolerance and cooperation. Providing opportunities for contact in classrooms, workplaces, and beaches – e.g., through civil rights legislation -- does not touch the political-economic principles that structure social relations. There is no suggestion of new, cooperative ownership of property, cooperative management of institutions and distribution of wealth that would overcome these principles and facilitate concrete cooperation among groups, increase the opportunities of minorities, and foster tolerance among dominant cultural groups. When concrete cultural contexts and forms of behavior/psychology are reorganized along specifically cooperative lines, social cooperation is successfully achieved, as Sherif, et al. 1954/1988 experimentally demonstrated.

Diversity expands the ethnic composition of the social hierarchy, but it does not alter the structure and principles of the hierarchy. Diversity allows marginalized people to join upper echelons of society, but it does not alter the pyramidal structure in which a few wealthy, powerful individuals dominate the populace. Diversity diversifies the participants in the system without changing the system. Thomas (2008) terms this “banal multiculturalism.”

Multiculturalism rests upon the false belief that individuals change systems through their individual qualities; no direct change in the principles that govern the system is indicated. Yet we know after decades of civil rights legislation that changing the gender and ethnicity of social participants does not change the system. The presence of Obama, Condoleezza Rice, Margaret Thatcher, Hillary Clinton, Alberto Gonzalez, Imelda Marcos, and Clarence Thomas in positions of governmental leadership has left the pyramidal, exploitive social structure of capitalism

intact.

Michaels (2006) explains another reason why multiculturalism cannot generate substantive social equality among ethnic groups or social classes: it focuses upon cultural issues such as prejudicial attitudes and ignores political economic change: “If we can stop thinking of the poor as people who have too little money and start thinking of them instead as people who have too little respect, then it’s our attitude toward the poor, not their poverty, that becomes the problem to be solved. [Then,] we think of inequalities as a consequence of our prejudices rather than as a consequence of our social system, and [we] thus turn the project of creating a more egalitarian society into the project of getting people to stop being racist, sexist, homophobes” (p. 19). “You’re a victim not because you’re poor but because people aren’t nice to you because you’re poor” (p. 106). This leads to attacking people’s attitudes toward oppressed people rather than attacking the conditions that cause the oppression.

For instance, while cultural diversity is increasing at elite universities, of the 146 “selective” universities 3% of students come from the lowest socioeconomic quarter of American society while 74% come from the highest. You are 25 times as likely to run into a rich student as a poor student” (pp. 95-96). Thus, diversity is window dressing on the homogeneity of social class (Melamed, 2006).

This is illustrated in the cultural treatment of domestic violence. It emphasizes the gender dimension – males abusing females – while obscuring the class dimension. Domestic violence is said to be a male female problem that exists in all classes. While domestic violence does technically exist in all classes, it is greatly overrepresented in the lower class, by a factor of 7 times. “We take a problem that significantly involves people’s economic status and pretend instead that it’s a problem about the relations between the sexes” (Michaels, pp. 117-119). This exempts political economic class from criticism. And since class is a more powerful cause of domestic violence (and all social psychological problems) than gender (and ethnicity), obscuring class leaves domestic violence (and all social psychological problems) irresolvable.

The discipline of sociology recapitulates this ignoring and obfuscating of class and capitalism: “Although stratification is arguably the subject area of greatest interest to sociologists, the American Sociological Association does not have a section on the sociology of stratification. What the association does have are sections on the sociology of sex and gender, Asians and Asian Americans, Latinos and Latinas, and racial and ethnic minorities, and one section devoted specifically to the interaction of race, gender, and class” (Massey, 2007, p. 37).

Michaels shows how culture does not simply displace social class, it converts it into a cultural category which prevents recognizing it as a political phenomenon (Michaels, 2006, p. 172). “When the problem is inequality, the solution is identity” (p. 161). “The debate about inequality becomes a debate instead about prejudice and respect” (p. 173). In fact, about half of poor people are white, so poverty is not a matter of discrimination but rather of cruel economic forces (p. 172).

Diversity impedes solving the problem of inequality, segregation, and prejudice; criticizing the obstacle enables solving them.

Conclusion

Because psychology is formed by macro cultural factors which are the cornerstones of society, it follows that psychological and social enrichment require a transformation of macro cultural factors. This is the unique political thrust of macro cultural psychology. Social psychological transformation entails a social critique that takes full account of its concrete nature and the viable possibilities of change. Social critique cannot emanate from acultural abstract psychological principles such as agency, tolerance, communication, self-expression; nor can immanent social critique emanate from abstract social principles such as “justice,” “peace,” “tolerance” and “human rights” (McIntyre, 2008). Extra-cultural abstractions are uninformed by concrete macro cultural factors and cannot generate concrete, viable alternatives which avoid concrete impediments to them.

As I explain in Ratner 2011a, the battle for the concrete is the foremost intellectual and political struggle of our time.

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Notes

¹ Durkheim (1914/2005, p. 37, 41) also said that social existence and social consciousness are contradictory to innate, natural, individual processes. “We cannot give ourselves over to moral ends without unsettling the instincts and inclinations that are the most deeply rooted in our body.” “Our activity displays two altogether opposite characteristics depending upon whether it is under the sway of sensory or rational motives.” Vygotsky made the same important distinction between natural, lower behavioral mechanisms and higher, social, conscious mechanisms. However, where Vygotsky resolved the contradiction by subordinating natural to social mechanisms, Durkheim felt the contradiction is unresolvable, and constantly buffets and torments human beings.

² Honor killings are generally supported by the entire family including mother and sisters. Honor killings can also be committed on males who seduce women.

³ Portraying cultural factors and psychology as independent and dependent variables, respectively, misrepresents the relationship. It presumes that culture pre-exists psychology and generates it as a by-

product. It presumes that psychology is outside of cultural factors and is “influenced” by them in a secondary manner.

⁴ Thus, there is nothing unfathomable or “inhuman” about honor killings, or the psychology of evil in general. Assuming that the psychology of evil is peculiar and violates human nature, erroneously assumes that human nature has a natural beneficent content that requires some abnormal countervailing influence.

Recent research by Wendy Lower reveals that German women were active participants in the Holocaust; they were not insulated by any natural feminine nurturing tendencies. Women constituted about 5,000 of the extermination camp guards. And “in many cases where genocide was taking place, German women were very close by. Several witnesses have described festive banquets near mass shooting sites in the Ukrainian forests, with German women providing refreshments for the shooting squads whose work often went on for days.” In the occupied territories, “Women ran the storehouses of belongings taken from Jews” (New York Times, July 18, 2010).

⁵ Massey (2007, p. 19, 195) explains the importance of spatial segregation for social stratification: “Spatial segregation renders stratification easy, convenient, and efficient because by investing or disinvesting in a place, one can invest or disinvest in a whole set of people.” “Throughout history, therefore, whenever the powerful have sought to stigmatize and subordinate a particular social group, they have endeavored to confine its members to specific neighborhoods...” “As the U.S. polarized economically during the last third of the 20th century, it also polarized spatially [poor people concentrated in neighborhoods with other poor people, while rich people lived in physical concentration with other rich people]. As poverty became more concentrated spatially, of course, so did everything associated with it: crime, violence, disorder, substance abuse, welfare dependency, poor health, and lagging educational achievement...The end result was the emergence of a new geography of inequality – a categorical segmentation of America’s social geography that gave rise to a new set of self-reinforcing political, education, social, economic, and cultural mechanisms that hardened the lines of class stratification and deepened inequality in the United States.”

⁶ Macro cultural psychology recoils from punishing deficient individuals. Punishment implies that individuals, not society, are responsible for misdeeds, when, in fact, oppressed people are not the

authors of their own behavior. Personal responsibility is an inappropriate term in oppressive society. It falsely attributes power to people who do not have it. Punishment is political in sustaining a benevolent or neutral view of society. Punishment thus embodies and promotes a theory of behavior and society.

⁷ Skandrani, et al. briefly acknowledge this: “Their religiosity is a more individual experience than that of their parents, which was strongly buttressed by a community of believers. Moreover, this association of religious practice with the private realm represents an adaptation to secular principles and calls for individuation fostered by the French society” (p. 307). It is the norms of French society that have generated the girls’ subversion of Islamic codes; their resistance was not an original, inventive act that liberated them from social pressures. However, the authors do not integrate this observation into their theory of agency.

⁸ Conservative defenders of the status quo are the most avid advocates of individualism because it supports the social pyramid. If individualism truly enabled people to alter their class position and join the ruling class in controlling resources and social life, the ruling class would never support individualism. Conservative politicians and businessmen know that as people are thrown onto their “own” resources, the influence of social class organizes their behavior. The best way to ensure class hierarchy is to call for individual resourcefulness, responsibility, and choice – and to oppose public support systems that could more equally distribute resources in ways that would truly overcome the class hierarchy.

Individualism is thus the most mystifying ideology that has ever been invented. No other ideology has so completely disguised social determinism as freedom.

⁹ Many cultural psychologists reject macro cultural psychology’s objective, concrete macro cultural analysis. They feel this imposes external, expert analysis on oppressed people and it prevents people from collectively figuring out their own solutions. However, this objection is as faulty as denouncing medical science because it was not invented by “the people.”

It is more humane to provide people with useful scientific information that can enrich their lives than it is to encourage them to “dialogue together” to find their own solutions which may not be adequate. It is

more humane for a few scientists to teach people how to treat their water than it is for a multitude of people to come up with some popular, unscientific solution. Similarly, it is more humane for macro cultural psychologists to use a scientific analysis to teach people how to reorganize specific macro cultural factors in ways that will provide for viable, democratic social organization, than it is for people to spontaneously dialogue and fail to reach this conclusion (as was the case with students in research presented earlier). Individualistic, liberal cultural psychologists privilege the interpersonal process of discovery over scientific, structural results. Yet viable structural end-points provide the extensive and enduring framework which people need for improving their lives.