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L. S. Vygotsky and the question of personality in the historical - cultural approach

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The topic of personality has represented a very controversial scenario throughout the history of psychology. Practically all schools of psychology have had to approach this topic in one way or another. A theory of personality did not appear as a central concern in Vygotsky's theoretical core, nor in the Activity Theory, which was considered for a long time a strong extension of Vygotsky's theory in the former Soviet Union. Regardless, I consider Vygotsky's ideas on this topic as very interesting for the current needs in the development of a historical-cultural approach in psychology.

In my opinion, one of the mistakes in the analysis of Vygotsky's ideas in Western psychology, has been to isolate Vygotsky theory from the context in which he worked and from the whole intellectual movement that was generated within former Soviet Psychology. Vygotsky was part of a movement that characterized itself for its creativity, and which enjoyed a lot of contributions from many other different psychologists. In the beginning of the historical-cultural approach, Vygotsky and Rubinstein were the most productive and creative influences.

Many Soviet psychologists recognized that, besides Vygotsky, there were other important contributors to historical-cultural approach in the Soviet Union, for example, Leontiev wrote in the introduction to his book *Activity, Consciousness and Personality* that :

“Methodological and ideological questions remained in the center of attention of Soviet Psychology, particularly in the initial period of its development, which was marked by the publication of such books, fundamental in their ideas, as Vygotskii’s *Thought and Speech* and S.L. Rubinstein’s *Fundamentals of General Psychology*. ” (1977, p. 2)

It is clear from Leontiev’s statement that there are two important subjects to discuss: First, the role of ideological questions in the foundation of that theory, and second, the crucial importance of Vygotsky and Rubinstein in the development of the basis of Soviet Psychology. These facts have been ignored in Western Psychology. Rubinstein and his followers are less known than the followers of Activity Theory in the West.

Among Vygotsky’s followers, the name of L. I. Bozhovich has received even less attention than the followers of Activity Theory . Despite of the fact that Bozhovich was a part of Vygotsky personal team, she was less known in Western Psychology. The acceptance of Vygotsky’s theory in Western Psychology has been mediated by Western thinking to the extent of separating his theory from Marxism and other Soviet psychologists.

In this paper I will examine the topic of personality as an important subject that influences the diverse courses taken by cultural-historical approach in current psychology. Personality was an important category either for both Vygotsky and Rubinstein. For Rubinstein (1967) it undoubtedly played a more important role. The theoretical and ideological explicit interests of the pioneers of former Soviet Psychology led them to search for a complete, complex and living representation of human psyche, that could not ignore the concept of personality. This category, as in most of the categories used in that psychology, should be reconstructed in order to allow the complex integration between social influences and individual psyche, which is an important goal in the history of any cultural psychology.

One of the main problems historical-cultural psychologists have to deal with at this moment, is to define the place of history, which through time has been replaced by current social influences. Current social influences are taken as objective factors that directly influence the individuals, but the specific and complex social networks, configured through groups, institutions, communities, and other less formal social organizations, have been less worked on within the historical-cultural approach. It has been very interesting that the strongest field of development of this approach has been educational psychology, whereas its expression in social psychology still is not as much recognized by psychologists.

The understanding of the historical character of social network is impossible without understanding historical subjective constitution of personality. In personality, the social influences become historical and it informs researchers in many different ways about the constituted elements of social thought and its subjective and singular configuration in personality.

In Rubinstein's ideas, personality played a key role. In Vygotsky's ideas the use of the concept of personality did not play the same important role in his central categories . In a prior analysis of Vygotsky's work ¹ I pointed out that it is necessary to differentiate the theoretical core of Vygotsky's organized ideas from his more general representation of psychology, which did not appear so clear in his works. Indeed, this general representation is very important and productive in current discussions in psychology. In my view, personality is part of a more general Vygotsky's representation of psychology . That is the present concern of this work .

The topic of personality in Vygotsky's work

¹ González Rey. F (1997) L.S.Vigotsky : presencia y continuidad de su pensamiento en el centenario de su muerte. En Psicología y Ciencia Social. Vol 1. No 1.1997. México.

It is not my intention to attribute to Vygotsky more than he did in life, what has been done by many authors. I think that idealizing is not a task of science, therefore I do not give him credit for developing a theory of personality because this category was not used by him throughout his work.. On the other hand, I intend to do a research work on Vygotsky's ideas about personality, in order to show one side of his thinking and the other side of Soviet Psychology thinking. Both , have been completely misunderstood in current cultural - historical discussions.

I think that the topic of personality was not a very easy subject for Soviet psychologists, due to its central place in the theories that were labeled at that time as "*bourgeois* psychology".

Threatening government political pressures were at that time very dangerous to psychologists . Despite that, it seems that psychologists were not always at the center of attention of the political officials. Soviet psychologists received important theoretical information from the Western world, which was evident in the forewords of Vygotsky and Luria in reference to Freud's book "*Beyond the Principle of Pleasure*". It was also evident that Vygotsky and other Soviet psychologists used Western psychology of that time as an important intellectual resource to construct Soviet Psychology.

Personality was a term that was not fully developed in Vygotsky's work, but was not completely absent in his ideas. He was very concerned with topics which are in the center of personality theory, such as the integration of cognitive processes and emotions, and the complex mediation of external influences through current organized psychological processes.

Such processes were viewed by Vygotsky as moments of a whole organization of human psyche. This is very clear in his concept of "social situation of development". Through this concept, Vygotsky tried to explain the complex processes which make up new qualitative states of development during human life.

Vygotsky's use of the concept of "social situation of development" integrates a very complex and dynamic way the historical psychological organization of the individuals and their current social experiences at each stage of their psychological development. Social experiences influence individuals through their internal psychological world, in a very similar way to Rubinstein's ideas, when he argues that "...*external motives act through internal conditions*". The use and development of the concept of "social situation of development" might become an important basis for developing the concept of personality, which was only assumed by Bozhovich and her followers after Vygotsky's death.

In Vygotsky, the category of "social situation of development" remained unfinished, it was only introduced in some parts of his work. The category was only used by Bozhovich long after its presentation was made by Vygotsky. Bozhovich tried to develop the topic of motivation and personality on the basis of Vygotsky's central ideas, and she was the only one among Vygotsky followers who attempted to do so. The other attempts in this field resulted from other theoretical roots within Soviet Psychology.

Consequently, a full development of the concept of social situation of development was allowed to develop in the historical and active conception of individual as a subject which was a very important contribution of Rubinstein conception. Therefore, he developed the topic of personality. Rubinstein began a completely new approach to personality, which has been continued by some of his followers, for example Abuljanova, who has developed Rubinstein's ideas in a way that has brought her close to the concept of subjectivity.

As mentioned above, in spite of the fact that one of the Vygotsky's essential ideas was the emphasis on the cultural-historical character of human psyche, he did not develop the role of societal mediation in the constitution of individual psychological processes. On the contrary, he constrained his analysis to the present social activity of individuals, which remained out of the equation of the complex phenomena of social constituted network within which the individual(s) lives, in different levels of social subjective organization. This social subjective organization in its complexity and wholeness is exactly what I had already

defined as social subjectivity. Some authors, such as Chaiklin (1994), Duveen (1994) and Elhammoumi (1998) have pointed out the absence of societal perspective in the historical-cultural tradition.

From my point of view, not developing a whole and complex understanding of the individual does not allow psychologists to come to a real comprehension of how social facts are part of a complex system within which personality is configured and where individual becomes the subject of his / her experience. Social environment takes part of the individual's psychological constitution in a complex process. This process is actively influenced by the subject actions and personality . During such complex process, the individual social experience becomes a source of new subjective senses and meanings that will actively take part of the subjective configuration of personality. In subjectivation of human experiences, it is impossible to differentiate between external and internal experience mainly because these sides of human experience cannot be distinguished between each other in terms of the quality of the subjective configuration of development. The individual subject does not result from direct social influences but rather he/she is part of the complex social system within which the persons live and develop as a part of a whole developing social system.

The category of social situation of development may become an important concept for the construction of this complex process, but should not be considered as an isolated category.

This category could only be more meaningful as a part of a system if Vygotsky had constructed and developed the topic of subjectivity. Subjectivity is simultaneously social and individual, affective and cognitive, intra and interpsychological, conscious and unconscious, external and internal, representing another ontological order in the definition of human psyche.

The fact that Vygotsky could not articulate his view of personality within a more complex representation of the social constitution of psyche, was a crucial point in the way psychologists followed this approach after his death, particularly in the development of

Activity Theory. This theory played an important role in keeping psychology away from the topic of subjectivity. The absence of a complex representation of a system of individual psyche, led Vygotsky to develop the concept of internalization, what had drove him away from the concept of social situation of development. If the concept of social situation of development had progressed , the comprehension of the ways by which external become internal might had been understood in another way.

In general, the term interiorization became a cornerstone in the effort to develop an objective psychology. This definition leads to the view of a one-sided deterministic causality, from the external to the internal, what helped to eliminate the subject of this process, as well as his/her personality. The best expression of the way in which Vygotsky understood interiorization was Leontiev's comprehension of it. On this regard Leontiev wrote :

“Interiorization is, as is known, a transition that results in processes external in form, with external material objects being transformed into processes that take place on the mental plane, on the plane of consciousness; here they undergo a specific transformation - they are generalized, verbalized, condensed, and most important, they become capable of further development, which exceeds the boundaries of the possibilities of external activity” (p. 58, 1978).

Leontiev presents in his arguments the external operations with objects functioning as a kind of “raw material” that directly enters the individual consciousness. Only after external material becomes internal, consciousness begins to work with that prefabricated content, extending itself beyond the original boundaries of the external operations.

The system proposed by Leontiev is a very mechanical and essentially maintains the subject-object dichotomy, keeping psychology closer to the object. This completely coincides with his preoccupation of the objectivity of knowledge. This was a common general characteristic in the development of Soviet Psychology, precisely by taking the objective character of psyche as one of the cornerstones of a marxist interpretation.

Vygotsky was also worried about the question of objectivity, but in his general representation of psychology he explicitly showed interests related with more subjective perspectives of psychology development. This was evident in his references to the topics of emotion and personality throughout his work.

The difficulties with the term of internalization reflect the effort of many different authors to reconceptualize it (Wertsch , Valsiner, Pino, and so on).for example, Valsiner has employed the term as a constructive process, but in my opinion he does not enrich so much the original Vygotsky's version. On this regard Valsiner has written :

“Internalization is a process by which meanings that relate to phenomena, and that are suggested for the individual by “social others” who pursue their personal goals while assuming social roles, are brought over into the individual's intrapsychological system. This “bringing-over” process involves constructive modification of the “brought-over”material by the person.”(1998, p. 115).

Valsiner, in his version, made explicit the constructive modification of the material coming from an external domain, which was also implicit in Vygotsky's definition. Valsiner's definition continues to center on the transition of external to internal, emphasizing the constructive operations of an individual on those meanings coming from the “social other”.

Concentrating on Valsiner's quotation it is possible to raise the following questions: Where are the emotions of an individual during this process? Is modification of the “brought-over” material only defined by constructive operations? Is the information that comes from the “social other”, and which is brought over into the individual intrapsychological system, preserving the external-internal split between that information and the intrapsychological system? In my opinion these questions reveal some of the weaker points of Valsiner's view, which are interesting but similar to the weak points of Vygotsky's original version.

In that process, emotions are completely ignored because they are viewed as a system of operations rather than as a complex and multidetermined process. This complex process is

completely new from the qualitative point of view of the human psyche, and in it is impossible the distinction between external influences and internal psychological organization. In a subjective sense, both moments are completely together into a unique new quality of the subjective configuration of experience. This process only takes place as a complex subjective process, a process of subjectivation that involves individual needs, that appear as emotions, and the constructive process of the subject. Both emotions and constructive processes are present in the process of subjectivization as a whole.

Subjectivization is a processual condition of subjectivity, it has a permanent developmental character. So, in order to understand this complex and dialectic version of subjectivity from the historical-cultural approach, it is necessary to better understand its processual nature, which is continuously reinforced by a constant tension between meanings and senses, As well as the permanent generation of this tension during the subject's actions. Personality is defined here as a system of subjective sense in the history of the subject. It is part of the course of the subject's life.

For Leontiev, the objective and instrumental understanding of psyche was far more radical than in Vygotsky's theory. Even Vygotsky's ideas that were more oriented towards the mediational nature of meanings, were less developed in Activity Theory. This theory was centered on the objective, operational and instrumental character of human activity. It was one of the reasons why some authors, such as Zinchenko, has have presently tried to differentiate the historical-cultural approach from Activity Theory . Of course, the term activity in Soviet Psychology cannot be only reduced to Leontiev's definition. As Lektorsky pointed out :

“ I think that S.L.Rubinstein has pointed out some real drawbacks of A.N.Leontyev conception...His version does not take into account the very specific and important role of artificial things, human -made objects, in the process of human activity”(1993, p. 48)

For Leontiev, as for Vygotsky, the term personality was replaced by consciousness as a central concept for the study of psyche. It does not represent, from my point of view, a simple game of categories, it was something more central, that brought important consequences for the ulterior development of the historical-cultural approach.. This replacement has much to do with the cognitive and semiotic interpretation of Vygotsky, that became dominant in western psychology. In this interpretation Vygotsky is closer to Mead and Pearce than to his contemporary colleagues and followers, in their effort to develop a new psychology.

Consciousness, without any doubt, represented a more appropriate term in order to support an objective view of psyche. As Leontiev put it :

“ The special function of sensory images of consciousness is that they impart reality to the conscious picture of the world that opens up before the subject. In other words, owing especially to the sensory content of consciousness, the world appears to the subject as existing not in consciousness but outside his consciousness - as an objective “field” and the object of his activity”(1978, p. 81).

The way the term consciousness is used maintain a direct relation between external and objective world, and psyche. This use of consciousness became an essential premise for the comprehension of psyche as an objective reflection of reality.

In that approach, consciousness is analyzed as an objective entity, as a reality in itself. Consciousness is presented as a completely de-personalized and de-subjectivized entity. In this regard Abuljanova (1973) commented that:

“... he [Vygotsky] eliminated the condition of the individual as the subject of social activity, keeping him only in the condition of the subject of consciousness. The child

is only the subject of the assimilation of social experience, that is, essentially, the subject of cognitive activity, of knowledge” (1973, p. 134)²

Abuljanova’s critical statement is mainly regarding the application of Vygotsky’s ideas in education. Vygotsky’s ideas have been much more applied in the explanation of cognitive development than as a new formulation oriented towards the development of the student as the subject of learning and of the social relations in school.

Nevertheless, it is very necessary to consider the other side of Vygotsky’s ideas on personality, as well as the place of these ideas in Bozhovich’s work. Bozhovich and her followers represented one of the most fruitful applied psychological approach to educational practice and research in the former Soviet Union. Taking Vygotsky’s ideas on personality, I want to focus on the way he used this concept in his text “*Basis of Defectology*” . At the time Vygotsky wrote his book, he was explicitly involved with Adler and Stern’s theories, which had a great influence on his own work.

Vygotsky had quoted in relation to the analysis of the motor deficiencies : “ The problem of motor insufficiency is a beautiful example of the unity reached within heterogeneity observed in a child with defect. Personality develops as a unique wholeness, and as a unique wholeness it reacts to the deficiency , to the alteration of the equilibrium provoked by it , creating a new system of adaptation and a new equilibrium able to replace the altering one.. But due to the fact that personality represents a unique wholeness and acts as a unique wholeness, it defines in its development defines advancement of different functions in not proportional ways. These functions are relatively independent one from another. These postulates, i.e, the variety of relatively independent functions in the development and the unity of all these processes in personality , do not contradict each other, as Stern had demonstrated , they complement each other. The high and intensive development of some functions, for example , of motor capacities, reflects the reaction of

² This quotation was taken from a spanish version of Abulanova’s book and translated for me to english. The spanish version appears in the final references of the present work

compensation of the whole personality that results from the defect of another function” (1983, pag 14) (My translation).

In the quotation presented above , it is clear that the orientation of Vygotsky was to consider different psychological functions within the complex and dynamic organization of personality. Vygotsky and Rubinstein knew from the very beginning , that one of the most important challenges for the development of a new psychology , was the development of a more integrative representation of psyche. This was explicitly presented by Vygotsky in “The historical meaning of the crisis in psychology..”, in his claim to develop a metapsychology able to overcome the dominant fragmentation of psychological knowledge. However , these interesting ideas about the function of personality were not found in his later works.

In my opinion , it is necessary to redefine the category of personality within a historical-cultural approach . To recognize that psyche has its own ontology. It is impossible to reduce it to an objective thing or operation of the external - material world . This challenge assumes the need to recognize and legitimize the topic of subjectivity, which has been completely ignored and rejected in the mechanical , positivistic and adaptative version of marxism, which was dominant in the mainstream circles of Soviet Social Sciences.

An attempt to develop the topics of motivation and personality on the basis of L. S. Vygotsky’s theory: Bozhovich and her followers

L.I.Bozhovich was , without any doubt , the person who most clearly understood the potential of Vygotsky’s ideas on the topic of personality from a different perspective within the historical-cultural approach. Bozhovich centered her analysis on three key concepts of Vygotsky : social situation of development , “perichivaniie” and the relationship between emotions and needs. Another important Vygotsky’s idea, which Bozhovich adopted was the mediational character of the sign in the definition of high psychological functions.

Bozhovich introduced an interesting analysis about the concept of “perichivaniie”. According to Bozhovich, Vygotsky considered “perichivaniie” as the “unity” of psychological development in the study of the social situation of development for a short period of time. Later Vygotsky defined the term unity as meaning, which was used by him in the study of consciousness as meaning. The category of development was a central concept to broaden an attempt to understand the whole character of psyche rather than the use of the concept of consciousness that would later predominate in Soviet Psychology.

Vygotsky understood “perichivaniie” as the integration of cognitive and affective elements, which always presupposes the presence of emotion. This concept was used by Vygotsky in order to emphasize the wholeness of the psychological development of children, integrating external and internal elements at each stage of development. Vygotsky had tried at different times to find a way of understanding emotions and cognitive elements as a unity.

Unfortunately this effort did not continue after he took other theoretical courses. On this regard L.I.Bozhovich is quoted : “ By doing this Vygotsky closed the circle of his reflections. He began to reject the intellectual and atomistic interpretation of child psyche, emphasizing “perichivaniie” as indivisible wholeness, as the “unity” that allowed the understanding of the character of the environmental influence on psychological development. Later, Vygotsky understood “perichivaniie” on the basis of intellectual development... “ through which he returned to intellectualistic positions” “ The Vygotsky’s thesis that in the end, the “perichivaniie” is defined by the level of generalizations, is, in fact, an error” (1981, pag 125) (My translation) .

The emotional factor in human development and in human psyche has been very controversial even up to now. However, Bozhovich took an important step forwards by considering emotions in relation to needs and not as results of any external causes.

Bozhovich’s claims that emotions are an expression of the current state of needs and motives in relation to individual performances and aspirations. She has written on this topic :

“Behind “perichivaniie” there is the world of children’s needs - of their aspirations, wishes, purposes - in their complex interaction and in their correlation with the opportunities of satisfaction. All this complex system of links , all this world of children’s needs and aspirations should be known in order to understand the nature of the external influences on child psychological development” (1981, pag 128).

Bozhovich pointed out the close relation between “perichivaniie” and the complex network of affective constituted dynamic states of the child. She attempted to understand the complex affective world in its own constitutive nature. She criticized the Leontiev’s definition of motive, in relation to which she wrote : “In the beginning of our inquiries, we followed A.N.Leontiev’s criteria about needs and motives. But from the very beginning we had to change the definition of motive, because it was impossible for us to work with a term that always presupposed an object of objective reality ” (1977, pag 20). The topic of motivation has always been very difficult to understand as a reflex of the external world that becomes internal through interiorization. Leontiev, in his search for objectivity, reduced motives to the object of needs, trying to define it as one more component of activity.

In the same article quoted above , Bozhovich stated : “ When we tried to know which needs are “crystalized” in a concrete motive, i.e, what is behind a child inclination to a concrete object, we find a complex combination of needs, wishes and intentions of the child, and it is very difficult to understand where the objective and the motive of activity are” (1977, pag 29-30). (My translation) These kinds of theoretical reflections led L.I.Bozhovich and her followers to change their representation of motivational processes , and on that basis , to begin a different line of inquiries that would be impossible to develop within Leontiev’s conception.

Following Vygotsky’s principles , L.I.Bozhovich began to develop the topic of personality. She tried applying Vygotsky’s ideas of higher psychological functions to the study of high motives of personality. In this way, she defined the concept of psychological formations (obrazavaniie), which are systems of motives mediated by consciousness. She has written:

”However, the typical motives of human behavior are moral feelings, consciously elaborating purposes, which by their genesis are needs mediated by consciousness.” (1977, pag 32)

On the basis of high emotional systems different interesting inquiries were developed which allowed Bozhovich to understand aspects of child and adolescent development that were completely ignored before , such as those related to moral ideals, to inadequate affective reaction of personality, and so on . These inquiries allowed a better understanding of the moral and affective side of development as it was never done before in Soviet Psychology.

In relation to her understanding of personality, Bozhovich explicitly took a position that followed the central core of Vygotsky’s ideas regarding higher psychological functions. In this respect she affirmed : “The study of new psychological formations - high psychological functions and systems- appears in relation to the development of the affective -emotional sphere and on its bases , it should lead , in my view, the way so that personality can be studied “ as a higher and more complex system of psychological formations by its structure.”

As a result of our applied inquiries, we think that the affective - emotional sphere of personality should follow the same principles of cognitive development ” (pag 168) (My translation)

Bozhovich tried a further development of Vygotsky’s ideas about the inseparable unity between cognition and affective processes. Bozhovich came to the conclusion , like Vygotsky, that the principles that guide higher cognitive processes and high emotional processes were the same, what instead of representing an advance in the comprehension of new qualitative phenomena of psyche, in fact led to a new kind of cognitive reductionism in the comprehension of personality. In this sense, the general principles of higher psychological functions defined by Vygotsky are transformed into new universal principles for the explanation of psyche.

In spite of Bozhovich's theoretical constraints, she advanced the comprehension of personality, in relation to Vygotsky, and over all, she established several new lines on the study of personality that led to a new theoretical production on this topic. One of her followers, Chudnovsky, for example, began to demonstrate the need of the topic of subjectivity for the development of a theory of personality.

From an epistemological point of view, Bozhovich demonstrated the importance of Vygotsky's ideas for the production of new zones of sense in the study of human development. Bozhovich and her followers empirical research was so important that it transcended their own theoretical construction, becoming a rich source for new ideas on the theoretical definition of personality.

Vygotsky's ideas about motivation and personality were so ignored by Leontiev, that in the chapter devoted to personality of his book *Activity, Consciousness and Personality*, he did not mention Vygotsky at any time . In spite of the fact that Vygotsky abandoned his ideas about personality in his key topics of theoretical construction , they have contributed to develop the topic of subjectivity within the historical - cultural perspective.

The topic of personality in Rubinstein's approach

Like Vygotsky, Rubinstein was a pioneer in the development of Soviet Psychology and they had some similarities, but, there were also many differences between them. Rubinstein, like Vygotsky, understood psychology from an historical - cultural perspective, and Rubinstein also understood psyche as an inseparable relation with activity. Some basic general principles of Soviet Psychology were common to both of them.

Rubinstein was so concerned with the philosophical basis of psychology that he focused mainly on the theoretical development of psychology mainly. His contemporaries criticized him on this. The critics, in my opinion, were very influenced by a hidden positivistic

orientation that was dominant in the mainstream of Soviet Psychology .Such implicit orientation later appeared very clear in the empirical-experimental approach taken by psychological research. Under the name of Activity Theory the reinforcement of an empirical-objective trend in psychological research became notorious.

My idea to include Rubinstein at this point, has to do with my explicit objective of analysing Vygotsky within the context of Soviet Psychology. In relation to the topic of personality it would be impossible to ignore Rubinstein. Personality was a key concept throughout Rubinstein's work. In Rubinstein's view personality was not a static internal entity, but a system involved in human activity. On this topic Rubinstein has stated (1959) : "The introduction in psychology of the concept of personality , means before all that in the explanation of psychological phenomena we have to start from a real existence of man as a material being and from his relationships with the material world. All the psychological phenomena and their inteconnections belong to concrete, living and acting man.." (Pag 116) (My translation)

Although it is possible in the mentioned quotation to see the influence of an objective, material representation of human being, it is also possible to see that Rubinstein made an explicit principle that played an very important role in the ulterior development of the category of subject : the close link between personality and a concrete and active individual.

This principle was essential in order to overcome the intrapsychological representation of personality that was so characteristic of psychological theories of personality then and even until today.

The representation of personality as belonging to a concrete individual is an important step toward the comprehension of the individual as a psychological subject. According to this assumption, personality is inseparable from human activity, the psychological subject an important and active condition for the comprehension of the social constitution of human psyche. The introduction of the category of psychological subject gives a new meaning to

personality within an historical -cultural approach, and at the same time it represents a different option to the concept of internalization in the effort to explain the historical - cultural nature of human psyche.

Rubinstein's principle of unity between consciousness and activity, which was then a central topic in his work, was a reaction to an one sided interpretation of the principle of activity by Leontiev. He tried to find in the concept of personality a new way to understand and develop a whole and active view of the individual , which was able to support the social constitution of psyche without losing its specific historical character. In this way, Rubinstein took a different path in the study of psyche in comparison to Vygotsky and Leontiev .Rubinstein did not attempt to replace personality by consciousness. This made an important difference that brought him nearer to a topic of subjectivity than any other psychologist of that time.

The attempt to rescue the active character of the individual was an extremely difficult goal for Rubinstein and his followers, taking into account that in the middle of the 1930's social psychologists tried to import the central concepts of the interpretation of human mind directly from philosophy. These social psychologists tried to explain individual personalities by using their class status. This was the main reason soviet social psychologists did not fully develop the topic of individual.

The Rubinstein's reflections on personality were combined with a new comprehension of the place of social facts in psychology. According to Rubinstein's paper "The tasks of Soviet Psychology" K.A.Abuljanova stated: "The central thesis formulated by Rubinstein in the mentioned paper, points out that the essence of Marxist approach to the topic of social fact is its comprehension, not as language, as culture, communication, instrumental activity, etc, but as social relations as a whole. And it is exactly in this respect that the differences between Soviet psychology and any other approaches of burgeois psychology appear." (1980,pag 135) (My translation)

In fact, the understanding of social system as a complex network of facts that integrate the individual as a subject, is an important condition for the constitution of the social system. The individual is constituted by the social system and at the same time is a constituent element of that system. This assumption is very important for the comprehension of subjectivity.

Subjectivity may only be understood as a result of a new complex representation of the individual and social conditions, in which both of them would be closely interconnected in the definition of a new ontological phenomenon.

Final comments about personality in the historical - cultural approach

The development of the topic of personality in the historical - cultural approach is a requirement for overcoming the one sided interpretation of human psyche. This has had a more clear expression in the current trends taken by psychological research in different fields of human life. The development of the concept of personality in an historical - cultural approach is, in my view, inseparable from the development of the category of subject.

The subject, as it was defined by me in several prior works , “is interactive, conscious, volitional , and always part of any current context within his / her social network” ³. Presently, as a result of our effort in order to develop the topics of emotion and motivation as important topics in the definition of subjectivity, I have added to this definition the emotional character of the subject because the subject is part of his/ her different experiences, carrying personality, as carrier of the complex systems of needs and motives configured in it. This condition defines the individual’s constant emotional involvement in any activity.

³ The category of subject appeared in more organized terms in Gonzalez Rey F & Mitjans A “ La personalidad : su educación y desarrollo ” but it appeared in english in my work Personality , Subject and Human Development

One of the important challenges for the development in the topic of personality from the historical - cultural perspective, is the development of a theory of needs and motivation irreducible to other “logics” , to the logic of something different from its own nature. This in my view, has been a very strong trend throughout the history of psychology. This tendency has taken different forms according to different times, in which it has appeared as hidden new versions of racionalism. The subjectivization does not appear only as a process of language, meanings, discourse of any other higher phenomenom of culture. The process of subjectivatization, on the contrary, is a way of extending a cultural - constitutive side of psyche, to all human processes including biological . In this way, the complex constitution of subjective configurations of personality does not only involve discourses or constructive sides of human experiences. It includes organismic processes that reveal the quality of human relation through other channels in relation to the complex system of needs and motives.

We are far away from a conceptions of needs as a pregiven individual entities or drives that are universal to human beings. On the contrary, we want to develop a concept of need that is able to reveal the emotional quality of social and cultural involvement of human beings. On this topic we have stated: “ Needs are a complex combination of current requirements of human activities and the exigencies of self organizaing psychological functions, many of which are defined during the development of personality.” (1999, 262). In this definition needs appear as a constituent moment of personality, not as an intrapsychological and stable moment, or as a moment that results from the involvement of personality in the subject’s action. This means that needs are an expression of the constant involvement of the subject in daily life, they are subject’s affective states, which emotionally charge different subject’s actions, such as constructive and discursive processes of the subject .

Needs become an important source of emotions and affective states of the subject. They permanently become part of the development of the subjective configurations of personality, within which they transform themselves into new qualitative subjective senses. The

: The Subjective Character of Human Activity .” (1999) This reference is part of the references of the present

subjective sense is the emotional quality that characterizes the continuing development of the subjective configurations of personality on each of its stages. The term subjective sense, introduced by Vygotsky in order to define the uniqueness of human experience in consciousness, has not been fully developed after his death. It has been relegated to a second plane as a result of the dominant tendency, among current socio-cultural researchers, oriented towards the analysis of macrosocial and meaningful processes, such as discourses, “voices” and so on.

In spite of its different uses in Soviet Psychology after Vygotsky’s death, subjective or personal sense, as it has been used by different authors, was not taken as a synonym of meaning. Thus, for example, A.N. Leontiev wrote on this regard : “For this reason the internal movement of a developed system of individual consciousness is also full of dramatic effect. It is created by senses that cannot “express themselves through adequate meanings, senses that have lost their real life basis and for this reason sometimes agonizingly discredit themselves in the consciousness of the subject; it is finally created by the existence of motive - goals that are conflicting against one another”(1978, page 94).

In spite of his clear orientation to objectivity in the comprehension of consciousness, Leontiev understood the complex and contradictory process of senses in consciousness, which, in his own words “ cannot express themselves in adequate meanings”, thus is in our point of view an expression of a completely rationalistic reductionism in the comprehension of senses, but it also carried the idea of two different processes that cannot be reduced to one another .

Needs are those dynamic states that result from the organization of emotions as a whole. These emotions have different origins: affective states of the subject, current configurations of personality, conflicts, and so on. Needs integrate themselves as a moment of the ongoing configurations of personality, which are involved with the current moment of social activity.

In this condition they are simultaneously part of the quality of the social situation faced by the subject and a the self organizing moment of the process of subjectivization of a new experience. This complexity is impossible to be reduced to any kind of cultural generating code of meaning, in spite of the fact that meanings actively participate in this process.

There are some lines of psychological inquiry in which would it be impossible to go ahead without these constructions. Thus it is quiet impossible to understand the subjective sides of human diseases are quiet impossible to understand without a new representation of needs and emotions , that gives meaning to situations which are impossible to be conceptualized in terms of discourses, meaning or voices. What the subject needs exists not only in the current terms of any “social other”, but as part of an individual history that is subjectively configured in a very complex network of processes, among which emotion has its own sense.

Emotions , needs and motives do not represent isolated categories , but they label processes of the wholesness subject - personality which integrated individual subjectivity. In this view, motives are the configuration of different needs, values, beliefs and representations, that integrate each other on the ongoing cultural life of the subject giving sense to his/herexpressions in the different fields of life. Therefore, no human expressions result from biological or social drives taken on their own. They are always the expression of the complex emotional network that appears as the synthesis of individual cultural life.

The affective constituent sides of human subjectivity open a new heuristic spaces in the study of human being and of social life, that could not be understood from other angles of the study of psyche. If we really are convinced that in terms of scientific knowledge it is not possible to monopolize the truth in any concrete trend or concept, the debate about the topic of emotions and personality would be fruitful since it allows to produce new knowledge and inquiries that do not exist under other current establishing perspectives.

Psychology is full of attempts to explain everything through a narrow group of categories, which has become a kind of “epistemological circle “of fashion that has been dominated in different moments of the psychological thought. It seems to me that at this moment new circles like those are appearing in the current dominant trends of historical-cultural approaches, in which discourses , voices and meanings, appear being the only qualified terms in the explanation of human psyche. As part of this cycle the term narrative has also appeared like discourse. This term is common to current variants of historical - cultural approach, discursive psychology and social constructionism.

Today , it is possible to affirm that there is an ongoing process of integration of different psychological theories, which may mark an important qualitative moment in the development of psychological knowledge, but in this process the different trends that coexist under the same theoretical label should be distinguished. Thus, a lot of differences also coexist inside the historical – cultural approach. They should be made explicit so that we can know them better. It seems to me that the topics of personality and subjectivity may become very important in the development of this approach, which had its origins in the theoretical core of their pioneers.

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