

Contexts and Continuities of Critique: Reflections on the Current State of Critical Psychology in South Africa

Desmond Painter

Stellenbosch University, South Africa

Peace Kiguwa

University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa,

Werner Böhmke

Rhodes University, South Africa

Abstract

‘Critical’ is still a desirable prefix in much of South African psychology. Whilst ‘critical psychology’ as such remains a fairly vibrant niche within the discipline, one with its own textbooks, modules, conferences and heroes, various kinds of ‘critical’ are also routinely articulated across the discipline more generally. Mapping the uses of ‘critical’ and references to ‘critical psychology’ in South African psychology over the last number of years indeed reveals a complex, often contradictory picture. ‘Critical psychology’ often functions as a marketable academic commodity rather than a coherent theoretical domain; as a site of ‘moral’ and even ‘aesthetic’ distinction rather than political articulation. The question we pose in this paper is therefore whether ‘critical’ still signals anything in South African psychology besides a marketable academic niche or a handy strategy for academic distinction (from ‘the mainstream’). Does it, in other words, bring about relays between psychology, politics and society that are meaningfully different from those already found in ‘mainstream’ applications in South African psychology? In order to answer this question we will focus on the contributions made by psychologists to research, advocacy and activism in a number of domains, including disability, community development, gay, lesbian and transsexual issues, and migration. We will also approach a number of South African psychologists for their assessments of the nature and value of ‘critical psychology’ in South Africa today.

Dedicated to the memory of Jill Henderson (1974-2012)¹

Some years ago (in a similar overview published in this very journal) it was still possible – or at least, it *seemed* possible, even fitting – to reflect on the emergence of critical psychology in South Africa in glowing, almost celebratory terms (Painter, Terre Blanche & Henderson, 2006). That piece was written hot on the heels of the publication of a major critical psychology textbook (Hook, 2004), and with a significant number of senior academics pledging some kind of critical allegiance at the time, regular critical conferences, at least one

¹ Jill Henderson was a critical psychologist and, at the time of her death, Research and Advocacy Coordinator at Triangle Project (a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex health and development NGO) in Cape Town, South Africa. She contributed to a previous overview of critical psychology in South Africa published in this journal (Painter, Terre Blanche & Henderson, 2006), and had agreed to contribute to the current overview. Sadly, this was not to be. We remember fondly a good friend and courageous comrade.

established journal in the field (*Psychology in Society* – PINS) and strong evidence of critical content in psychology curricula at many universities, it certainly seemed as if critical psychology was unassailable in South Africa.

This sense of confidence is echoed by another historical overview of the field, this time by one of the doyens of critical psychology in South Africa, Don Foster (2008). According to Foster, critical psychology – in his words ‘a rather loose, undisciplined and rag-tag headboard for quite a number of diverse streams of theorising and practices’ (p. 92) – has ‘arrived on the shores and in the heartland of South Africa’ (p. 92). After a wide-ranging account of alternative, and especially politically progressive voices in South African psychology since the 1940’s, in which he illuminated a number of significant figures and events neglected by Painter, Terre Blanche and Henderson (2006) in their overview, Foster concludes:

... [I]t should be abundantly clear, in terms of the sheer amount and diversity of work, particularly over the past decade, that critical psychology has taken root in the southern region of Africa, not least perhaps in reaction to the region’s long histories of colonial and oppressive regimes. A critical psychology, not one thing, has begun to push boundaries in a diverse set of directions involving theory, research and practice. While still involving a minority of scholars in South Africa, it seems as well grounded here as in any other contemporary geographical location. (pp. 115-116)

How have things developed and changed in the half decade since? What is the state of critical psychology in South Africa today, nearly 20 years after the end of apartheid? Is it still as ‘well grounded’ as Foster (2008) claims? Answering these questions depends largely on how one demarcates ‘critical’ from ‘noncritical’ psychology, and on the extent to which one is willing to submit critical psychology also to critical interrogation, rather than occupying it as a moral high ground – splendidly untouched by the political and market forces it sees operating everywhere else but *here* – from where ‘the mainstream’ can be pilloried. Certainly, if critical psychology is taken to encompass everything that is ‘non-mainstream’ (which in turn is all too often reduced to the opposition: ‘qualitative’ vs. ‘quantitative’ research; or: ‘constructionism’ vs. ‘positivism’) it would be very easy to answer our questions. If such was our principle of demarcation, then critical psychology is indeed still well-grounded and vibrant in South Africa: qualitative research studies abound; global intellectual trends find their local advocates; authors from Agambem to Žižek are dutifully referenced. Moreover, for reasons we will discuss in more detail later on in this paper, it is still relatively *easy* to be a critical psychologist, that is, to successfully reproduce oneself as a salaried academic in ‘critical’ terms, at contemporary South African universities. Critical psychology remains a minority position, certainly; but as a niche within the broader (and growing) market for psychology, it is not under any immediate threat – at least not in its form as an *academic commodity*...

In this paper we insist that critical psychology in South Africa should be *more*: more than merely following academic fashion (who is ‘in’ this year, Foucault or Badiou?); more than self-congratulatory games of moralistic one-upmanship (‘we’ are good guys, ‘they’ are obviously or even wittingly bad), and certainly more than the sub-disciplining of ‘critical psychology’ into neatly packaged curricular sections that may peacefully coexist alongside all the other contents already peddled to students – and to the broader public. Regarding the latter, it is important to acknowledge that contemporary psychologisation can proceed by means of ‘critical’ vocabularies and stylistics also. Rearguard attempts by neo-positivist academic psychologists in South Africa to patrol the borders of ‘scientific’ psychology, both in the academy and in professional practice, by means of epistemological dictate and legal interventions alike (e.g., Kagee, 2006; 2009; Lund, Kagee & Wood, 2010), in fact simply

confirm that alternative (non-positivist, non-mainstream, non-academic, and even *critical*) psychologies are not external to the machinations whereby subjects today are constituted and through which they come to recognise and conduct themselves as such. On the contrary, alternative psychologies are increasingly powerful. For critical psychology it means the following: We cannot beatifically position ourselves outside the appropriation of psychology under capitalism, simply because *we* recite Deleuze or Foucault, whereas *they* keep on repeating Milgram and Seligman.

One of the main problems with celebratory accounts is that they neglect to interrogate the conditions and modes of critical psychology's reproduction in a particular place and time – as a domain of psychology, but also, from the perspective of its mostly *academic* subjects, as an identity, a career path, a form of (moral, political, scholarly) distinction. In playing either the moralistic game of good guys vs. bad guys – in which the critical academic subject emerges as either victims or victorious – or the scientific game of better knowledge vs. worse knowledge – in which what we do is portrayed as providing better accounts of and answers to the *same* academic questions and social issues mainstream psychology services – critical psychology risks remaining blind to its own commodification in contemporary markets for academic goods. Even more importantly, it fails to take into account of the essentially contradictory nature of its reproduction as a form of psychology; the extent to which sets of relations (within psychology, within the university, between the university, the state, industry, NGO's, communities and social movements) simultaneously curtail the development of theoretically coherent and robust critical psychologies (as part of broader commitments to critical social science theory and practice) and enable it to flourish as a marketable academic niche.

Nevertheless, our aim is not to impose an exclusionary logic on what critical psychology might be and become (in South African and elsewhere), or to militate against the diversity of critical approaches in existence today. The problem is not with diversity, but with the refusal to conceive of critical psychology outside and beyond the dominant 'relations of production' operative in the social sciences – even in so-called *critical* social sciences. We are also not suggesting that critical assaults on psychology should be tempered in any way. Critical psychology should aim to subvert mainstream psychology, certainly, by altering how we think about and do psychology, by challenging the ways in which we are individually and collectively constituted as subjects in psychological terms, and by finding ways out of the intellectual and political confines imposed upon (and by) academic psychology. In other words, critical psychology should seek an end to the conditions of psychology's academic alienation – from neighbouring disciplines as well as from social subjects and movements outside the university. But this needs to be done not on the grounds of academic fashion, moral posturing, or better marketing strategies. The critical psychology we demand cannot be satisfied with what remains essentially an *aesthetic* mode of self-stylisation (what methods we use, who we quote, etc.) – as if the ways in which we present ourselves cannot be, and *isn't already*, appropriated into strategies of control and reproduction in the contemporary university and society at large. Beyond a superficial distancing from mainstream psychology (by simply asserting that we look different or are better equipped), critical psychology should ground itself in ongoing theoretical labour (however diversely articulated) about the nature of subjectivity and society, including a theoretical grasp of the role psychology (mainstream *and* critical psychologies) itself fulfils in that society – its role, for example, in the psychologisation of subjectivities and social relations.

Critical Contexts

The question we believe should be posed is not whether there has been an increase or decrease of critical interventions in South African psychology (which, to the extent that it relies on often unarticulated notions of what critical psychology is, is indeed in the eye of the beholder), but whether 'critical' still signals anything in South African psychology beyond a marketable academic niche or a handy strategy for academic distinction. Does it, moreover, bring about relays between psychology, society and politics that are meaningfully different from those already claimed by 'mainstream' applications in South African psychology?

In an environment where 'social relevance' is already a cherished ideal (e.g., Macleod, 2004), and where academic and professional psychology alike unfailingly position themselves as responsive to the social and mental health needs of post-apartheid reconstruction and development, it is not always clear what makes *critical* psychology different. For an increasing number of erstwhile 'critical psychologists' in South Africa, this is a nonissue; they no longer wish to insist on a fundamental distinction between mainstream and critical psychology or to identify themselves as critical psychologists. They consider it more important to respond to pressing social issues, and to pool 'critical' with mainstream tools in the service of providing solutions to those issues. In other words, they remain committed to an overarching and essentially neutral conception of 'Psychology', *within* which, not *against* which, they offer, in relation to particular social issues, their 'critical contribution': 'methodological' and 'theoretical' innovations which are either offered as complementary to mainstream interventions, or as alternative psychological approaches to the very same social problems.

For others, again, it is the *outcome* that defines an academic intervention as 'critical': a study can be critical, for example, because it furthers an anti-racist agenda. Thus it does not matter whether the research is quantitative or discursive, positivist or constructionist. In fact, 'triangulated' approaches are increasingly favoured. The self-critical interrogation of psychology as it is reflexively involved in the topics or social issues studied – co-constituting it as a social problem, developing a discourse with which it can be discussed, opening it to intervention – is all but abandoned. Psychology is thus rendered functionally transparent, even when 'critical methods' (like discourse analysis) are employed. In both cases the 'critical' is reduced, either to superficial qualities of the research, or even worse, to the 'good (political) intentions' of the researchers. These reductions of the meaning of 'criticality' lead, according to us, to a psychology that is critical in name only; one which neglects the central tasks of a genuinely critical social science.

At this point it is perhaps useful to consider the larger fate of critical theory and praxis in South African social sciences (and humanities) after the demise of apartheid. We live, in the words of Vale and Jacklin (2009, p. 1), in 'a time when deep thinking about the social world, even within the academy, is not encouraged.' They continue:

It is probably true to say that anyone who sat through the fecund discussions on South African historiography generated in resistance to apartheid in the 1970s and 1980s might have thought that critical social thinking was in the country's very DNA. But when apartheid ended, *critical thinking ended* – and abruptly too. (p. 1, emphasis added)

Perhaps this is too simplistic: as Wacquant (2004) argues, critical theory internationally is both under pressure *and* abundantly in evidence everywhere today. This is true in South

Africa also, especially if one searches for critical theory beyond the narrow confines of disciplinary and departmental boundaries; and outside the university, in social movements, or in art, literature and other areas of popular culture. Nevertheless, Vale and Jacklin (2009) are correct in identifying a major shift after apartheid in the kind of social science knowledge production that has primarily come to be rewarded at South African universities: critical-emancipatory thought has given way to a technocratic understanding of social science utility concerning the governmental demands of the fledgling post-apartheid capitalist state. The reason for this shift has not been state repression of intellectuals, but rather a 'normalisation' of social scientific self-understanding at South African institutions, in line with what is happening at universities worldwide. The social sciences in South Africa, both in university context and in state research institutes, are increasingly being restructured to better fulfil the role Calhoun (as cited in Vale & Jacklin, 2010, p. 7) identifies as their primary functions in liberal democracies, namely 'generating statistical support for public policy analysis, predicting demographic trends, and assisting in social engineering' (see also Dubbeld, 2009; Vale, 2011).

The erosion of critical thinking and praxis in favour of a code of entrepreneurial scholarship at South African universities went hand in hand with the increasing corporatisation of these institutions and the adoption of a discourse of 'research excellence' which rewards publication in high impact international journals, the securing of large research grants (which means that the questions social scientists provide answers for are increasingly formulated elsewhere, rather than developed from within a critical discourse and in dialogue with social subjects), and 'applied' rather than 'basic' research. Furthermore, South African universities are increasingly reliant on non-state funding, which means further pressure on academics to 'monetarise' their research activities – by entering into academic-corporate research partnerships, for example, or by increasing their publication output (in South Africa, universities receive state funding per individual article published in an accredited journal). These are not the material conditions under which critical theory and radical social science praxis can flourish and it explains partly Vale and Jacklin's (2009, p. 1) observation that after apartheid, critical thinking came to an end at South African universities.

Psychology, unsurprisingly, has been tremendously successful under these new conditions. Whereas many of its neighbouring disciplines, especially those in the humanities, were faced with dwindling student numbers during the 1990s and early 2000s and had to seek innovative ways just to survive (making 'critique' and 'theory' luxuries that could often simply not be afforded), psychology has experienced the opposite. Its increasing growth in popularity at most universities means that departments of psychology often attract more students than all the other humanities and social science departments combined. Furthermore, psychology has traditionally been less theoretically inclined, and certainly less *critical*, than the other social sciences and humanities in South Africa: Marxist traditions in history and sociology, for example, stretch back to the 1970s and became almost dominant within those disciplines, whereas it developed much later in psychology and remained much more marginal. Psychology was thus uniquely positioned after 1994 to exploit its principal apartheid characteristic to the full, now in the service of post-apartheid 'transformation' – especially when such transformation is considered in neoliberal political economic terms (Marais, 2011): an atheoretical willingness to serve as a technocratic functionary to those with power and money – especially when it can convince itself that it is doing so to further individual and social wellbeing. At many South African universities, psychology departments have experienced spikes in productivity; and academic and professional psychologists are working hard to retain (and increase) their share of the mental health market and to convince government, corporations, and privatised mental health clients that psychology has a service to offer...

And yet, at the same time, *critical psychology* has also flourished after 1994 (e.g., Painter & Terre Blanche, 2004). On the face of it, and seemingly contradicting the trend elsewhere in the social sciences and the humanities, critical thinking in South African psychology did not come to an end when apartheid ended. The end of apartheid instead opened psychology to a dizzying range of new theoretical and methodological influences, and the discipline suddenly found itself catching up with intellectual traditions like Marxism, post-structuralism, postmodernism, the discursive turn, and many more – some of which had been introduced during the 1980s already, but only really blossomed during the first decade of democracy. That this season of critical activity could be sustained should be attributed, at least in part, to the safety of numbers: larger student populations meant more faculty members, but also served as ‘captive markets’ allowing for the production of the important textbooks (e.g., Hook, 2004) through which critical psychology could be established and transmitted.

However, something was also subtracted from critical psychology in the era after 1994, namely, its proximity to praxis; to social movements. In some ways, critical psychology lost sight of its subject, its reference to agents and practices of historical change. It ceased theorising this relationship in ways that differ markedly from mainstream psychology’s own technocratic and client-service provider conceptions of knowledge ‘application’, and thus to distinguish itself significantly – in anything but form, the *aesthetic* mode of distinction we referred to earlier – from mainstream psychology. In other words, critical psychology increasingly became a subdiscipline rather than an alternative conception of psychology as such; it became, in fact, a niche market, self-referentially reproducing itself as a viable commodity alongside other formatted curricular content and academic identities. One of the consequences of this was that the link between critical and community psychology was severed, leaving critical psychology without an effective conception of praxis whilst de-radicalising much of community psychology by reducing it to being merely the provision of mainstream psychological interventions to ‘communities’ otherwise unable to afford psychology’s privatised services (Painter & Terre Blanche, 2004; but see Carolissen, Rohleder, Bozalek, Swartz & Leibowitz, 2010; Duncan, Naidoo, Pillay & Roos, 2007).

The context in which critical psychology has developed since 1994 and in which it currently reproduces itself is thus contradictory. Rather than consistently being committed to a viable alternative, critical psychology largely trades on the strength of mainstream psychology and its continued ability to draw students and to open ever-increasing areas of social life to psychological colonisation. Its relationship to mainstream psychology is too often parasitic and even *enabling* – furthering the advancement of psychology by other means. It all too willingly positions itself as a critical but complementary ally in the growing psychology industry; positioning itself, *as* critical psychology, at the very heart of neoliberal subjectification and control.

Critical Continuities

These cautionary comments should not be taken to mean that there is nothing to report; that critical psychology in South Africa has stagnated altogether or has been reduced to mere academic and political posturing. There is still a wealth of critical work being done: it covers a broad spectrum of topics, employs an increasing diversity of methods, is often produced by prominent members of the psychology fraternity in this country and frequently enjoys international exposure. Even in the short number of years since the publication of the previous overview of critical psychology in South Africa in this journal (Painter, Terre Blanche & Henderson, 2006), there have been noteworthy developments. The study of race and racism (with increasing focus on ‘whiteness’) and gender and sexuality (with increasing focus on

‘masculinities’) remain especially productive and politically important, but there are also other growth areas that deserve mentioning.

Growth Areas

One of these growth areas is the field of disability studies, with important contributions from psychology (e.g., McKenzie & Macleod, 2012; Swartz, Van der Merwe, Buckland & McDougal, 2012; Watermeyer, 2012; Watermeyer, Swartz, Lorenzo, Schneider & Priestley, 2006). The significance of disability studies for critical psychology in South Africa can be traced to a number of key features that characterise this emerging field. Firstly, it has consistently demonstrated a commitment to both academic modes of critique and social movement based activism. Whilst the latter has perhaps not explicitly been explored as a principle of critical psychology praxis in South Africa (many critical psychologists still endorse rather vague ideals of ‘social relevance’ and ‘application’), it certainly provides a space for exactly such a reflection. Secondly, it has been willing to venture beyond conventional modes of academic representation by exploring also the provocative use of alternative formats, such as photography and autobiographical writing (e.g., McDougal, Swartz & Van der Merwe, 2006; Richards, 2008; Swartz, 2010). Thirdly, perhaps because of the intrinsic centrality of the body and materiality to both its theoretical concerns and more practical struggles around access and exclusion, disability studies seems almost programmed to resist the discursive reductionism of so much recent critical psychology work. With the founding of the *African Journal of Disability* in 2012 the field is likely to continue growing, and hopefully to impact on critical psychology debates about subjectivity, the political, and the nature of praxis.

Another area of continuing significance for critical psychology is the ‘African psychology’ movement. The recently founded Forum for African Psychology (FAP), a Division of the Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA), reflects a significant growth in the demand by the increasing numbers of black academic and professional psychologists in post-apartheid South Africa for a psychology that is ‘African’; in other words, that is developed in accordance with African worldviews, values and cultural practices. Although still fairly marginal when viewed solely from the perspective of published output in both mainstream and critical journals and books (and one should indeed question the *reasons* for this underrepresentation), the level of attendance and debate at African psychology symposia at the annual PsySSA congresses certainly suggest a groundswell of support for a psychology with a different, more *African* accent. According to its Chair, Smangele Magwaza (2013), the FAP ‘promotes knowledge production and scientific activities that advance African-Centered psychology’ and aims through its organisational activities ‘to extend our psychological paradigms and embrace Africanness – identity, culture, experiences as well as create a state of unease around the current ideological constraints and stasis of mainstream psychology’.

Although there is certainly common cause to be found between the African psychology movement and critical psychology more generally, the former maintains a complex relationship with both mainstream and critical psychology in South Africa. On the one hand it is clearly a form of critical psychology: it critiques and rejects (much of) the ontological assumptions and value systems it perceives to be at the core of ‘Western’ psychology, and seeks instead to found its psychology on a different, uniquely *African* metaphysics. As such African psychology is not only an ally, but a potential vantage point from where the ‘Eurocentric’ tendencies evident also in *critical* psychology – which includes not only an overreliance on Western (or Northern) theory, but also a tendency to engage African theorists only once they had been endorsed by and re-imported from Northern universities – may be interrogated. This could stimulate the development of a critical psychology that takes its

location, and the social relations impacting on theoretical discourse and academic reproduction there, into account in a more radical manner. It could potentially also add complexity to the discussion of the ‘indigenisation’ of psychological knowledge and practices more generally.

On the other hand African psychology departs from critical psychology by not always questioning its status as – and desire to be – *psychology*. Adherents of the idea of an African psychology often do not wish to break with the academic and professional project of psychology (and the cultural force of ‘psychologisation’), but on the contrary to take ownership, through ‘Africanisation’, of the institutional positions and professional rewards that psychology and being a psychologist still make available in postcolonial South Africa, but that had been largely inaccessible to black professionals and intellectuals during the colonial and apartheid era. In other words, an uncritical valorisation of ‘culture’ may arguably function as a strategy of class distinction and mobility, which – if the notion of the ‘African’ itself is never interrogated critically – may not just mystify class interests, but bolster emerging discourses of an exclusionary African nationalism (cf. Alexander, 2013). This form of African psychology would not be a critical psychology, but merely another psychology enlisted in the service of and subjected to identity politics.

Furthermore, the idea of an African psychology is too frequently reduced to attempts at expanding the discipline (another mode of its ‘internationalisation’) by translating psychology into African languages and, in turn, by making African experiences translatable into psychological terms (e.g., Eeden & Mantsa, 2011). Similarly, African psychology is too frequently reduced to little more than a repository for new psychological commodities which can be peddled locally and globally – usually in the career interests of academic and professional psychologist-entrepreneurs themselves, rather than the subjects and communities they ostensibly represent. Recently, for example, Hanks (2008) ‘identified’ the notion of ‘ubuntu’ as an African psychological ‘paradigm’ which may yet become the ‘next force’ in humanistic psychology (see also Sliep, 2010). Long (2013) offers this cutting account of the market and political logic of this type of cultural or ethnic commodification:

The now much-banded-about feel-good term, *ubuntu*, which stresses the virtues of the communal life, has become the trade name for a free-source computer operating system. A Zulu *impi* bussed in from the nearest township can put on a spectacle for appreciative Versace-clad tourists in air-conditioned designer shopping malls. The late South African health minister, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, attempts to treat AIDS patients with a vegetable cocktail (specifically garlic, beetroot, lemons, and African potatoes), believing that ‘we cannot use Western models of protocols for research and development’ (BBC News, 2008). [...] As in the past, latter-day articulations of cultural essentialism are welcomed without much protest – presumably because they, too, corroborate a hegemonic political order. Black thinkers, including the likes of Aimé Césaire, Leopold Senghor, and John Mbiti, are routinely lionized in the course of hackneyed arguments about the cultural uniqueness of the continent and its potential as a fountainhead of indigenous psychological theory. (pp. 27-28)

Nevertheless, the African psychology movement represents an interesting and potentially powerful site of problematisation of certain forms of ‘psychological imperialism’ in South Africa. Rather than outright dismissing what is proclaimed in its name, critical psychologists in South Africa (and elsewhere) might consider instead a more dialectical approach to African psychology – attempting to engage with the powerful moments of negation which seemingly co-exist alongside a logic of psychologisation; and with the moments of affirmation of subjectivity which co-exist alongside an objectifying commodification of culture.

Publications and Conferences

The flagship journal of the Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA), the *South African Journal of Psychology* (SAJP), is still an accessible forum for the publication of critical psychology research and debates. Although by far the majority of articles published since 2006 have been mainstream in orientation, the theoretical, methodological and topical terrain covered by the journal remains diverse enough for the publication of critical psychology work not to be ruled out in advance. Significant articles have thus appeared over the last decade as individual contributions (e.g., on Foucault and Kristeva and their relevance for critical psychology, Olivier, 2007; 2010) and as part of thematically focused special sections/editions. Regarding the latter, the special sections/editions on the micropolitics of racial division in post-apartheid South Africa (2007), 50 years of the contact hypothesis and research on intergroup relations (2009), and the Apartheid Archive Project (2010) have all made contributions to the furthering of critical psychology agendas.

A number of important theoretical debates on issues central to critical psychology in the country have also been hosted in the pages of the SAJP. Marx and Feltham-King (2006), for example, launched a stringent critique of the 2005 special edition on racial isolation in everyday life, raising a number of vital (and still insufficiently answered!) questions about what the *critical* study of race and racism in post-apartheid South African psychology should entail beyond mere statements of 'good (anti-racist) intentions' and demonstrations of methodological sophistication (see also the response by the editors of the special edition, Dixon & Tredoux, 2006). Equally illuminating was a debate initiated by Green, Sonn and Matsebula's (2007) article in which they set out to develop a research agenda for the study of 'whiteness' in post-apartheid South Africa. The commentaries by Ratele (2007), Steyn (2007) and Stevens (2007), and the thoughtful response by the authors of the original article (Matsebulo, Sonn & Green, 2007) contributed greatly to giving further theoretical nuance to this emerging area of study in South African humanities and social sciences.

Psychology in Society (PINS) will celebrate its 30th year of continuous existence in 2013, which is a remarkable achievement for an independent academic journal, especially one devoted to critical psychology. The journal is likely to remain an important venue for critical psychology publication, as it continues to attract manuscripts despite the pressure on South African academics to publish in 'international' and 'high impact' journals. In 2007 and 2008, for example, PINS published two consecutive special editions on the theme 'Masculinity in Transition'; in 2010 it published a special edition devoted to the Apartheid Archives Project. And there have been other significant publications also. However, whilst its continued existence is vital, there is nevertheless a danger that PINS will be reduced to merely publishing 'qualitative research' or papers that apply themselves to (admittedly 'progressive') social issues. Too many papers that have appeared in PINS over the last number of years fail to engage systematically with the journal's stated concern with psychology *in* society – which entails not just a psychology applied to social issues, but a psychology that constantly updates its self-critique in line with a coherent theoretical understanding of the nature of society. Here it is interesting to pay mind to PINS' founding and still current editor, Grahame Hayes, who made the following statement in a keynote address at the Second Marxism and Psychology Conference in Mexico in 2012: 'It is my contention that we ... don't seem to talk enough about the *nature* of society, and especially the (future) society that we would like to bring about' (Hayes, 2012, emphasis in the original).

Although not explicitly critical in outlook, we should also mention two exciting initiatives produced by faculty and postgraduates at the University of South Africa (UNISA). The first is

the establishment of *New Voices in Psychology*, a journal devoted to the publication of student research. The journal is open to all kinds of research in psychology, but due to its editorial autonomy (postgraduates are also involved with peer reviewing and editing submissions) it provides a forum in which student researchers can push the boundaries of the discipline and experiment with representational forms in ways that might not be possible at one of the more established journals. The second initiative, linked to the journal, is a biennial Southern African Students' Psychology Conference. Once again, these conferences provide students from South African and neighbouring countries with a creative, relatively autonomous space where they can interrogate psychology largely unencumbered by fixed theoretical and representational expectations. The first two conferences ('Re-imagining Psychology' and 'Re-imagining Psychology: The Journey Continues') were hosted respectively in Botswana in 2009 and in South Africa in 2011. The next conference, in June 2013, will be hosted at Wits University in Johannesburg, South Africa. It has the provocative title of 'Psychology (In)action'.

Critical psychologists in South Africa often find themselves rather isolated figures in departments dominated by professional training programmes and mainstream approaches to research. In contexts like these, meetings, conferences and societies may be expected to fulfil the function of creating and sustaining a scholarly community. Unfortunately, very few such organisational structures have endured to support the reproduction of critical psychology as anything more than an individualised academic pastime in South Africa. There is, for example, no Division for Critical Psychology registered with PsySSA; and in fact, the majority of critical psychologists steer clear of the national Society and its annual conferences. One key development for critical psychology in South Africa in the immediate post-apartheid era was the establishment of a series of annual conferences, Critical Methods, in the mid-1990s devoted *specifically* to an engagement with a critical reflection of the processes and practices of knowledge production within South African psychology (Foster, 2008; Hook, 2001). These conferences provided a regular forum for local critical psychologists (including academics as well as activists and other interested parties) to engage with and debate the role of psychological knowledge (and the methodologies by which it is produced) in the midst of a climate of rapid and potentially far-reaching social change following the transition to democratic government.

Throughout the latter half of the 1990s, these conferences grew steadily and to some degree permitted the development of a sense of community and solidarity amongst researchers, academics, students and activists of a critical theoretical bent, and provided the space to think about ways of developing critical praxis, as well as alternative methods (to the mainstream positivist and largely quantitative traditions in the discipline) of knowledge generation and dissemination (Foster, 2008). Sadly, the impetus behind this burgeoning space for critical theoretical and methodological debate, together with the related focus on engagement with social issues that have traditionally fallen outside the realm of mainstream psychological research in South Africa, seems to have dwindled and disappeared over the past half-decade. The last of the original series Critical Methods conferences was hosted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban in 2005, coinciding with the International Critical Psychology Conference hosted by the same institution. There was a brief attempt to resurrect the spirit and focus of these conferences in 2008 when the Psychology Department at Rhodes University hosted a Critical Methods Conference. However, although a success on its own terms, this initiative was not taken further to become a regular event to be hosted on a rotational basis amongst South Africa's universities. At this stage, critical psychologists working at South African universities are often isolated from one another – and at times oblivious of one another's existence. Many of them find it easier to maintain transnational links (with colleagues located in the USA, UK, Europe, Australia and New Zealand; usually not in the

rest of Africa...) than local ones; and just as many travel to conferences abroad more regularly than they visit colleagues at other South African universities. One of the major tasks of a future critical psychology in South Africa will be to re-establish links, networks and solidarities; to recover and reimagine the shared spaces and projects that have been lost.

Race and Racism

One of the defining features of critical psychology in South Africa historically has been its engagement with issues of race and racism – an engagement that mainstream psychology during the apartheid era has largely avoided. Painter and Terre Blanche (2004) point out that one of the early points of impetus for the development of a more critical psychological praxis in South Africa during the 1980s was the attempt by some practitioners and researchers to engage with the hitherto ‘de-politicised’ nature of the broader discipline of psychology in this context, against the background of escalating popular resistance towards the apartheid state. Part of this critical endeavour was a reflection on the ways in which questions of race and politics had been dealt within the realm of psychological knowledge production (Painter & Terre Blanche, 2004); how psychology had been shaped by race and racism; and also insisting on analyses of *racism*, not just the euphemistically termed ‘intergroup relations’.

Developing from this critical focus on patterns and processes of knowledge production within the discipline, several academics and researchers began pointing to a debate concerning the relevance of psychology as a discipline to the South African context (Long, 2013; Macleod, 2004; Suffla & Seedat, 2004). Together with this focus, the social psychology of race, prejudice and intergroup relations became a prominent area for research that continued to develop into the immediately post-democracy era. The work of researchers such as Kevin Durrheim and John Dixon, amongst others, provides a good example of the ways in which critical methodologies and theoretical perspectives were brought to bear on the investigation of features of South African social life – in particular its enduring racialisation, especially at the level of everyday talk and spatial practices – that were long taken for granted. The *critical* psychology of race and racism initially distinguished itself from the more quantitative tradition of studying intergroup relations in South Africa by using especially discourse analysis to expose the social construction of race and the rhetorical strategies and ideological tropes employed to justify and maintain prejudice and exclusionary/racially segregationist practices in everyday life (Durrheim & Dixon, 2001; 2004; 2005; see also Robus & Macleod, 2006). However, over the last number of years – and increasingly so since the publication of Durrheim and Dixon’s (2005) important book *Racial encounter: The social psychology of contact and desegregation* – there has been an rapprochement between ‘quantitative’ and ‘qualitative’ approaches in this field of study, including the development and use of more mainstream social psychological tools, such as right-wing authoritarianism scales (e.g., Gray & Durrheim, 2006).

The success of this rapprochement between experimental/psychometric and discursive social psychology in the field of race and racism, so much so that discourse analysis has become part of ‘normal social psychology’ in this context, does raise the question of whether this former corner stone of critical psychology in South Africa still permits this description – beyond the fact that it is ‘anti-racist’ and thus critical of racists and the reproduction of racist social relations. We should be clear here: our concern is not with the use of quantitative methods; there is nothing inherently ‘critical’ about discourse analysis or inherently ‘uncritical’ about quantitative approaches. We also have no problem with the anti-racist agenda in evidence in this body of work. Our concern is rather with a certain ‘methodolisation’ of the study of racism which, whilst making for a highly successful and internationally tradable academic product (partly because it ‘standardises’ racism to become

common currency in social psychology), removes important dimensions of subjectivity – including that of the social psychologists *themselves*, not just as individuals with particular histories and social identities, but as subjects with societal functionality when they produce discourses on race and racism *as* social psychologists – from our understanding of the ongoing racialisation and potential deracialisation of everyday life.

One perceptive attempt to articulate this concern – and to question the inevitable equation of the social psychology of race and racism with *critical* psychology – can be found in a critique of a special focus section in the SAJP on ‘Racial isolation in everyday life’ by Marx and Feltham-King (2006). They make the valid point that the SAJP is also ‘a particular type of privileged space’ (p. 456); thus,

... [i]n turning the lens on the special section, one senses, perhaps for the first time, the violence of *being made the object of a positivist methodology* – particularly if we were to categorise individuals represented in this space in terms of ‘race’ and ‘gender’ and measure the distances in terms of their location (institution, author position). The challenge in this instance would no doubt be to measure the absences, and here we come to the point – *what purpose would our analysis serve?* (p. 456; emphases added)

Their understanding of ‘positivist methodology’ is this critique is not restricted to quantitative approaches, but involves a broader questioning of the fetishisation of method; one that may well lead to a reproduction at the level of theory and analysis precisely the kind of racialisation it seeks to expose and critique. Erasmus (2010) goes even further when she pinpoints another shared feature of experimental/psychometric and at least some discursive approaches to the social psychology of race and racism, namely a naïve, likewise ‘positivist’ reliance on the ‘visibility’ of race:

Following a founding raciological myth, this taken-for-granted visibility of race assumes researchers ‘knew’ who was ‘White,’ ‘Black,’ ‘Coloured,’ and ‘Indian’ simply by looking at bodies in space. [...] These studies used a Black-White binary which flattens the complexity of race, forcing it into a simplistic ingroup/outgroup conception of the world. This racialized regime of looking naturalizes race and racial membership, legitimates and enlivens apartheid categories, and obscures cultural competencies as components of making and complicating race. (p. 388)

A different and more recent framing of race and racism from an ostensibly critical psychology perspective is to be found in the Apartheid Archive Project (AAP), hosted at Wits University in Johannesburg, but drawing together a theoretically diverse body of researchers from different institutions and even countries. The AAP has been remarkably productive in a short space of time, yielding many individual publications, at least four special editions of journals (PINS, SAJP, *Psychoanalysis*, *Culture & Society* and *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*) and three conferences. The project consists of the collecting and analysing of ‘narrative accounts from ordinary South Africans about their experiences of racism under apartheid and the ongoing effects of these experiences in present-day South Africa’ (Hook & Long, 2011, p. 3). These authors continue: ‘The project aspires not just to record these narrative accounts, itself an important aim in remembering history, but also to engage thoughtfully and theoretically with the narratives’ (p. 3). Along similar lines, in their introduction to the SAJP special edition devoted to the project, Bowman, Duncan and Sonn (2010) write:

Even while celebrating this signal moment [the advent of democracy] in twentieth century history, many South Africans realised that the deep wounds inflicted on this

country and its people by the racist violence of the old order would not be erased with the transfer of political and institutional power from ‘white hands’ to ‘black hands’. Indeed, as the glow of this moment started to wane, as it had to, most political leaders in South Africa realised that these deep wounds would have to be addressed if social cohesion and wellbeing nationally were ever to become even remotely possible. [...] The project is therefore considered both a repository for people’s experiences and a platform for more fully exploring the methodological and interpretive possibilities implied by *a psychologically centred engagement with history*. Moreover, the project is also considered *a tool for activism because it enables both the writing and reading of alternative accounts of South African history*. [...] As a tool for activism, and a means for recovering collective memory, the project envisages the clearing of a space in which the many varied experiences of racism in the everyday or capillary networks of apartheid power may find a voice. So far, the archive has provided an opportunity for the articulation of experiences that may otherwise have been rendered silenced or invisible. (p. 366; emphases added)

There are welcome signs here of a commitment to understand racialised subjectivities – caught up as they are in often contradictory social relations – in terms of the specifics of apartheid history, rather than in terms of reified social psychological categories or methods (e.g., Shefer, 2012). Furthermore, the focus on the recovery of collective memory – with clear resonances in Latin American liberation psychology – also opens the door to an engagement with race and racism from the perspective actual living subjects, who experience the present and manufacture the future in ways that will both trade on and (perhaps, sometimes) transcend race. On the other hand, one cannot ignore the elevation of psychology – as midwife and interpreter of these apartheid narratives – in this project. This becomes especially clear in the more psychoanalytically oriented work produced under the auspices of the AAP. According to Hook and Long (2011):

If we are to apprehend the ongoing echoes of apartheid racism – and other forms of racism in different international locales – we must view its ‘overdetermined’ historical and structural factors alongside such quasi-autonomous variables as the ‘private’ exclusions, negations, and denigrations effected by its beneficiaries. [...] The need to view racism as grounded as much in affective as in macropolitical means in the functioning both of fantasmatic and of material forms, perpetuated as much in private (or psychological) as in institutional (or discursive) domains. [...] the psychical impact, *the psychological dimensions of apartheid* and its history, have yet been adequately addressed. (p. 2, emphasis in the original)

Precisely how this ‘psychological dimension’ will be theorised and developed, and whether it will steer clear of yet another psychologisation of racism and social relations, remains to be seen.

Gender and Sexuality

The study of gender and sexuality remains a productive and important area in South African critical psychology and has garnered some international recognition. For example, a recent book by Catriona Macleod (2011), *‘Adolescence’, pregnancy and abortion: Constructing a threat of degeneration*, has won the 2011 Distinguished Publication Award of the Association for Women in Psychology. Furthermore, a wealth of studies – published in books and as articles, both locally and internationally – have appeared since 2006 on topics like motherhood and poverty (Kruger & van der Spuy, 2007), experiences of fatherhood after apartheid (Richter & Morrell, 2006), intimate partner violence (Boonzaier, 2008; Boonzaier &

van Schalkwyk, 2011; de la Harpe & Boonzaier, 2011), discourses and practices of normative heterosexuality (Shefer & Mankayi, 2007; Strebel, Shefer, Potgieter, Wagner & Shabulula, 2013) violence against black lesbian women (Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy & Moletsane, 2010), and many more. In the domain of gender and sexuality, as in the study of race and racism, there has been a longstanding reliance on social constructionism as an epistemological frame and on discourse analytic methods. However, a commitment to feminist theory – however differently articulated across various studies – has probably shielded the study of gender and sexuality somewhat from similar retreats into methodolatry and psychologisation.

Early activist feminist partnerships in South Africa were marked by the coalition of representatives from different political spectrums, whereby the idea of and urgency for forming a unifying national women's structure in the country was developed (Hassim, 1991; 2002). With a focused interest in grappling with intersections of differences of race, class and gender in women's lives, there was nevertheless still a contradictory silence in many contexts of gender activism on spheres of influence between the private and the public domain – demonstrating an ideological reluctance to engage with gender oppression, since it was presumed to undermine broader political struggles in the country. Despite these tensions and contradictions in the conceptualisation of gender oppression, these early initiatives revealed an awareness of the oppressive gendered experiences characterising many women's lives and the need for more concerted interventions as part of a national agenda. The democratic transition in 1994 further propelled feminist expansion into political space and provided ever more public and political platforms for gender activists in the country to become part of a national dialogue on how to address the gaps between rhetoric and social change (Kiguwa & Langa, 2011; Waylen, 2002).

Such progress notwithstanding, a significant gap between rhetoric and real change continues to characterise the social landscape – a tension that is also evident between much feminist activist work and work produced in the academy, especially psychology. Indeed, it is most often within spaces outside of the discipline that much critical feminist-activist work continues to exist. Journals such as *Agenda* and *Feminist Africa* continue to provide spaces for many academic feminists in the discipline and activists alike to engage with pressing concerns of ongoing gender violence, militarisation, poverty, and sexuality, amongst other socio-political issues. This is not to say that there has been a complete silence within mainstream psychology on some of these issues, but rather, that 1) the politics of knowledge production continues to be fraught with individualistic and often apolitical forms of enquiry; and that 2) truly socially relevant interaction between the discipline and society at large, what Ratele (2003, p. 5) succinctly describes as a 'psychology of an actual, living society', remains fairly marginal.

Masculinity Studies

However, it should be mentioned that critical forms of psychological enquiry on the politics of gender do exist and continue to emerge, most recently within the area of masculinity studies. Until recently, masculinity as a distinct area of scholarship and critical investigation within the discipline has been largely explored as an adjunct to so-called 'women's' issues such as HIV/AIDS, gender violence, etc. In a critical review of psychological theorising of gender, Shefer (2003) argued for the necessity to document both women and men's experiences of heterosex and power in intimate relationships. Since then, masculinity studies have increasingly come to be recognized as important for broader socio-political interventions around especially gender and violence in contemporary South Africa. This domain of investigation in the discipline has arguably been more inclined to critical forms of inquiry than other gender-specific research. The critical study of masculinity is therefore likely to

remain of central importance to the development of critical psychology in South Africa in the immediate future.

Interestingly, the interpretive frame of inquiry adopted in recent special editions on masculinity in the SAJP and PINS grapple with the notion of gendered subjectivity as *psychosocial*. Morrell (2001) argues that this body of work is a welcome shift from what may be termed 'old style' feminist analysis to a new paradigm that engages with the changing socio-political landscape of post-apartheid South Africa. For example, critical explorations of how masculinities come to be enacted in less stereotypical ways and in 'atypical' contexts have been presented (see Langa & Eagle, 2008) in addition to how different forms of masculinities still continue to enjoy hegemonic expressions (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004). The proliferation of masculinity studies has also generated critical epistemological concerns regarding the politics and unintended consequences of this scholarship (Macleod, 2007). Morrell (2007) acknowledges this concern, but reiterates that masculinity studies holds the promise of adding to feminist scholarship in seeking to understand not only the social constructions of masculinity but also the power evident in heteronormative relations. In a similar vein, Ratele (2008) argues that 'the aim of men's consciousness thought is to give men something along the lines of women's studies gave to women: self-knowledge. Men's consciousness thought puts men at the centre, just like the women's liberation struggle put women at the forefront' (p. 26).

Much of the work in this area has engaged with re/presentations of masculinities that intersect with other social identities of race, sexuality, poverty, etc., and which form part of the broader social and national interventions related to HIV/AIDS, gender and violence (see Langa & Eagle, 2008; Mfecane, 2008; Mankayi, 2008), and demonstrate increasing collaborative effort between academic and activist-oriented initiatives in the country.

LGBTI Activism Post '94

The increasing demand to engage with issues and practices of homophobia, especially very specific practices of violence against black lesbians, is yet another pressing concern for many feminist activists within the discipline and society more generally. And yet, this remains one area of scholarship and practice that particularly highlights the divide between academic and activist researchers. While there has been an increased acknowledgement of the silences around the politics of same-sex sexuality and knowledge-production in the discipline and the social sciences more broadly (see Reddy, Sandfort & Rispel, 2009, for example), there still remains a paucity of concerted collaborative effort between academic and activist researchers. Public focus on activism for women in South Africa recently included a demand to engage homophobia as a crucial aspect of violence against women, as part of the 16 Days of Activism campaign in 2006 – highlighting an increasingly important form of activism in post '94 South Africa concerning gender violence, namely, the intersections of race, sexuality and poverty.

The plight of many black lesbians living in marginalised environments draw attention to the practices of gender violence as direct result of sexual identity. And yet, gender activism in post-apartheid South Africa has also ironically been marked by silences around homophobia (Mkhize, Bennet, Reddy & Moletsane, 2010). In 2003-4, the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW) initiated an advocacy and support intervention campaign 'The Rose Has Thorns', which highlighted these interconnections of race, sexual identity and sexual violence. Focusing on the stories of black lesbians living in urban neighbourhoods such as Alexandra Township (close to Johannesburg), the initiative has also provided ongoing legal and social support to women who had been raped and assaulted as a direct result of living their identities as lesbians. Since 2006 other non-governmental organisations such as One-in-

Nine campaign, OUT LGBT Well-being, POWA amongst others also became instrumental in taking part of the social conscious the challenges and experiences of many black lesbians throughout the country. There is now a well-documented corpus of material on the experiences and material realities of violence confronting black lesbian, gay and transgender South Africans. Not surprisingly, much of this literature and activism has been spearheaded by LGBTI organisations and activists.

Gender and Migration

The age-old feminist issue concerning voice and representation plays itself out within the rubric of migration studies. In a recent critical review of migration studies in PINS, Palmary (2009) notes that ‘the classification of migrants has a particular relevance for psychology as a technology for managing the individual and in particular individual suffering’ (p. 59), highlighting the power/knowledge nexus that has characterised knowledge production within the discipline. She further notes that the ‘conflation of (some) migrants with suffering and trauma is perhaps where psychologists have had the most influence on migration studies’ (p.59). More recently migration research has come under critical interrogation in its uses (and abuses) of gender. A recent publication, *Gender and Migration: Feminist Interventions* (Palmary, Burman, Chantler & Kiguwa, 2010), explores the often uncritical uses and political functions of how gender has come to be imagined as part of migration. Structured around three key thematic areas of enquiry, i.e. *visibility* (the politics of how migrants – women migrants in particular – come to be ‘seen’ in static and essentialist ways), *vulnerability* (how vulnerability has come to be constructed in essentialist gendered ways) and *credibility* (the politics of who gets constructed as a ‘credible’ migrant), the text deliberately frames its interrogation within a feminist interpretive frame, and at the same time presents significant challenges to feminist theory and practice. Given the extent of violence against (African) foreigners in South Africa in recent years (Landau, 2011), one can expect the study of migration to become increasingly important for critical psychology.

Conclusion

At this point, the key questions posed by Suffla and Seedat (2004) in their editorial for a special edition of the SAJP reflecting on 10 years of democracy warrant repeating:

Critical psychology may need to consider: a) an examination of the enabling and restricting influences of the macro-economic and research/educational policy environment; (b) strategies for expanding the current base of social actors leading its mission; and (c) planning for meeting the demands of mental and social health service delivery without losing the critical function of deconstructing the new emergent forms of discourse that may serve to justify and naturalise mutated forms of elitism and exclusive control of discursive material resources in South Africa’s young democracy. (p. 518)

To what extent has critical psychology in South African attended to these questions over the last half-decade? Much critical theoretical work in psychology has been devolved to specific study domains – notably, gender and sexuality, and race and racism. The overarching question about the *nature* of critical psychology, of what defines it as critical, has been attended to less frequently and systematically. In the process the overarching project of developing a ‘critical psychology’ has either been abandoned, or hollowed out to refer to anything ‘non-mainstream’ in psychology. More is needed, however, than sophisticated social theory and methodological innovation in particular, restricted domains of study, lest critical psychology falls into the trap of simply competing with mainstream psychology (however it defines the

mainstream it wishes to function as critical alternative from) in bids to prove its relevance: its ability to define and help solve 'social problems'; its ability, also, to fashion academic discourse – for its own sake; for *our* sake.

It is very difficult to predict what the future of critical psychology in South African psychology will be. It seems that the discipline of psychology is large and prosperous enough, and has a big enough stake in the production of discourses about our lives, for pockets of criticality not only to survive, but to find ways to participate in the very game of psychologisation it purportedly deplors. Unlike Vale and Jacklin (2009), we do not think critical thinking – at least in psychology – came to an end. Worst still, it had become commodified.

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Contact details:

Desmond Painter

Stellenbosch University, South Africa

E-mail: dpainter@sun.ac.za

Peace Kiguwa

University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

E-mail: peace.kiguwa@wits.ac.za

Werner Böhmke

Rhodes University, South Africa

E-mail: w.r.bohmke@ru.ac.za