

PINS: 20 YEARS OF OPPOSITIONAL AND CRITICAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Anniversaries are strange and arbitrary markers of time, and yet are universally “celebrated”. The remembrance of things past can be the occasion for joyous celebration as well as for sorrowful remembering. 2004 marks 10 years of democracy in South Africa, and besides being an election year, will be the occasion of numerous analyses of post-apartheid society in its first decade as well as an assessment of the performance of the ANC government over this period. So decades become the most common time-span for commentary, critical reflection, and celebration.

So with this issue – **PINS 29** (2003) – we mark and *celebrate* two decades of **PINS** publishing. The first issue of **PINS** appeared in September 1983 in historical, political and social conditions quite changed from those that we find at the end of 2003. The 1980s was a time of heightened crisis for the old regime and in true right-wing fashion it responded to challenges to its legitimacy through increased and brutal political repression. While the decade of the 1980s was a rough time to be an anti-apartheid activist, it was also characterised by a certain optimism, euphoria even, and vibrancy in the anticipation of a new democratic and non-racial society, as clearly the old regime was on its last legs. This decade also saw the formation of a range of popular organisations and social movements. The heightened political consciousness and intellectual engagement of this time and moment give rise to the birth of many forums for discussion and debate from newspapers (**New Nation, Vrye Weekblad**), magazines (**Work in Progress – WIP, Die Suid Afrikaan**), to journals (**Critical Health, Transformation, Agenda, and PINS**). Sadly, many of these excellent, and often fiercely independent publications no longer exist. *Part* of the reason for their demise is the retreat of a critical and opposition grouping consequent upon the overthrow of apartheid. Many of these erstwhile left-wing voices have joined government and are less committed to a critical stance, some have become consultants – again immersing themselves uncritically in what Foucault identified as the power / knowledge nexus, others are satisfied that liberation has been achieved, and yet others have withdrawn into the cynicism attendant upon the pursuit of middle class (“private”) lifestyles.

And so given the demise of many “little journals” in South Africa during this 20 year period it is quite remarkable – and worthy of some noting – that **PINS** has endured. The purpose of noting **PINS**’s 20 years of existence is to indicate, especially to new readers, something about the staying power of critical and oppositional ideas, as well as to use this “anniversary occasion” to make some comments about the journal in particular, and critical psychology more generally. The purpose is certainly *not* to engage in self-

congratulatory praise, as a thorough socio-historical account of **PINS** awaits its social critic! The editors – past and present – of **PINS** undoubtedly have things to say – both positive and negative – about what the journal has tried to achieve over the years, and yet we are too close to do this necessary task with the required scholarly dispassion.

The time of **PINS**'s formation – 1983 – was the start of a decade that in so many spheres of society began to prefigure the new post-apartheid society. In one sense it is quite unexceptional that at this time an “alternative” or “oppositional” publication in psychology should appear, and yet in another sense given psychology's historical conservatism it was quite significant. The time was right in the South Africa of the early 1980s for the formation of many oppositional and anti-apartheid forums and media. However, the history of psychology in South Africa up until this period hardly impresses one for its oppositional stance – quite the contrary, psychology in South Africa was at best trying to claim “neutrality” as a science (cf Biesheuvel, 1987), and at worst was “a servant of power / apartheid” (cf Webster, 1986). And hence the (oppositional) psychological voices associated with the early days of **PINS**, as well as with the nascent anti-apartheid mental health movement, were very aware of going against the grain of mainstream or establishment Psychology in South Africa. Not to put too fine a point on it – they were often derided for doing so!

It is important to contextualise the conservative stance of South African psychology as consistent with (Western) psychology internationally. Psychology in South Africa is still struggling to assert its own local and regional character, and in many ways mimics the theory and practice of psychology in the Western heartlands. A shift has occurred more recently that is coterminous with the advent of democracy that at least puts forward the project of a critical and socially articulated psychology as a legitimate process of disciplinary renewal. A psychology for and of our times in South Africa will not be achieved by rejecting the legacy of Western, or more derogatorily put, Eurocentric psychology, but rather through the rigorous interrogation of the historical resources of world psychology and the simultaneous engagement with the material conditions of social and psychological life in this country. It is humbling to realise that we are not unique, that we do share many experiences with people in other countries, and that yet we do have to find our own theoretical explanations and practical solutions. Paraphrasing Brian Fay (1998), he reminds that we do live in *one world*, albeit that we live in this world *differently*.

Psychology is, and historically has been, one of the most resistant of all the social sciences to the “contamination” of politics. As uninformed as it might be for disciplinary knowledge to think that it can “successfully” eschew politics, and as disagreeable as it is to those keen to integrate theory and practice, it is not especially difficult to trace the historical origins and explanations for Psychology's claimed political neutrality and social aloofness. Psychology's origins are in (Western) Europe of the mid-19th century with a very rapid uptake in many other Western countries, especially of the English speaking world (cf Manicas, 1988). The “West” is no ordinary or neutral notion, and is often a euphemism for capitalist countries with political systems of a broadly liberal democratic nature. Significantly the emergence of psychology is tied to the “maturing” of bourgeois society. The early decades of psychology are fused with European civilisation [sic], the West, bourgeois society, industrial capitalism, and rationalist conceptions of science and progress. This is not just a list of all things bad and evil, but more an

indication of the socio-historical context of psychology's founding, and the continuing significance this has in determining the nature and character of "mainstream" or "establishment" psychology. One of the most significant "developments" or outcomes of the bourgeois revolution was the notion of *private property* and the inscription of this in the legal system of industrial capitalism (Pashukanis, 1978). While private property functions mostly to protect the *owners of capital*, in democratic societies it "protects" all citizens. For a system of private property to function with the required social legitimacy, it needs a sophisticated sense of "the private" and of individual rights and entitlements as part of the taken-for-granted definitions of the societal fabric. The "formation" of the *private, individual* subject of the social property relations of capitalist societies spawned simultaneously an experience of individual (or separate from the social group) identity, as well as a form of abstract *individualism* (Sève, 1978).

Much of 20th century (western) psychology has been an uncritical acceptance of the emergence of the individual subject as the natural, dare one say the social evolutionary, unfolding of human society. Some of the consequences of this asocial and de-politicised history of psychology have been the promotion of an ideologically suspect view of value-free science; a form of abstract individualism masquerading as the study of concrete individuals; and a rather narrow conception of the social, and what it might mean to understand psychology as a *social* science. The significance of this for a critical psychology is not merely to insist on a more socially-responsive psychology, a more relevant psychology (relevant for whom one might ask?!), and an indigenous and / or Africanist psychology. The issues and questions facing Psychology – here and elsewhere – are much more complicated than this. Part of the task of disciplinary revitalisation for Psychology lies in articulating its social and *geographical* connectedness. An equally important task, which has received relatively little attention up until now, is the historical and theoretical – more accurately, epistemological - recovery of psychological disciplinary knowledge, and what Lakatos (1970) referred to as "research programmes". A Psychology that only attempts to be socially relevant stands in danger of being reactive, and hence politically reactionary, as well as being unresponsive to envisaging a different, more liberatory *future* for psychological theory and practice.

While **PINS** has published quite a bit on the social aspects of psychology, and will continue to do so (see for instance Macleod, and Davis's articles in this issue), we are especially interested in encouraging and promoting more socio-historical and theoretical (see Miller's article in this issue) analyses of the discipline. As mentioned in a previous **PINS** editorial, what constitutes *critical* psychology is an open question, and **PINS** has no intention of determining or foreclosing the debate on this issue. The issue of what constitutes a critical psychology, whether this label is even useful, is not only a matter for a journal like **PINS** to consider, but rather should be vigorously debated by all those interested in a radically different conception and practice of psychology. **PINS** is obviously interested in and committed to being a vehicle or forum for these type of "critical discussions".

One of the ways that **PINS** has tried to encourage these "critical discussions" has been through the production of "special issues". For instance, **PINS 24** – Social approaches to HIV/AIDS; **PINS 26** – The Truth and Reconciliation Commission; and **PINS 27** – Critical Psychology. In furthering this trend **PINS** will be devoting a special issue to the

problems of “race” and *racism* in 2004. This special edition will be edited by Kevin Durrheim (School of Psychology, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg) - see the advert and call for papers in this issue of **PINS**. Contributors should submit their articles by **30 July 2004**. The intended date of publication of the special issue on racism is November / December 2004.

It is ironic, if not actually socially and politically embarrassing, that there have been so few serious and sustained discussions about “race” and racism in post-apartheid South Africa. **PINS** is not the only defaulter on this central issue of social transformation. South Africa’s brutal apartheid past has done nothing to set the scene for the kinds of discussions and debates that it is necessary for us to have about the spectre of “race”, racial thinking, and racism that still bedevil the now 10 year old “new” South Africa. No matter how complex and sensitive an issue “race” is in this country – and the world at large by the way – we can no longer justify our continued silence on this score. Racism and ethnic hatred seem endemic in a world in the grip of the “war on terrorism”.

“Race” is clearly one of the more obvious aspects of social life that demands a concerted research effort from intellectuals and academics committed to the promotion of a just and peaceful social order. However, there are other equally as important axes of social privilege that need to be part of our social and psychological analyses. For instance, the notion (and reality) of *class* seems all but missing as an analytical category in much public and academic discussion these days. We seem “happier” talking about the poor, and that even stranger appellation “the poorest of the poor”, black economic empowerment, neo-liberalism, corporate social responsibility, human rights, and less comfortable with ideas about class privilege, rampant capitalist greed, environmental destruction (non-sustainability), social justice, and economic redistribution. It simply won’t wash to dismiss these issues as some form of atavistic Marxism or the usual political and intellectual infantilism attributed to left-wing critics! Marxism has clearly a lot to say about class, and this remains a central concept within a Marxist perspective of social analysis, but one hardly has to be a committed Marxist to see the importance of economic and class analyses. Neither “race”, ethnicity, gender, nor class operate in isolation, or have a privileged purchase in social analysis, and hence we need to be mindful of the consequences of what social terms or concepts we *omit* from our research work. The issue at stake is not whether these three or four concepts are *the central* concepts of social analysis, or of critical psychology for that matter, but rather that a discussion of *social theory* and its articulation with (critical) psychology might usefully become part of our research agendas. The least that can be said is that a psychology that espouses *critique* and social responsiveness can hardly be taken seriously if it doesn’t at the same time espouse a *social theoretic* understanding of its own conditions of possibility.

In these “anniversary and celebratory” remarks, **PINS** is not suggesting, and certainly not claiming, that it is the only vehicle or forum for these kinds of discussions. **PINS** is, however, wanting to state its claim for being part of the small, but quite broad grouping invested in promoting and realising a critical and liberatory psychology. There are a range of journals whose interests overlap with **PINS**. Some of these journals are more established than others – for example, **Theory and Psychology**, **Feminism and Psychology**, **History of the Human Sciences**, and **International Journal of Critical Psychology** to mention a few. Some have (sadly) come and gone – like the American

Psychology and social theory (4 issues between 1981-1984), and the British “Marxist journal in the theory and practice of psychology, psychoanalysis, linguistics, semiotics”, **Ideology & Consciousness – I & C** (9 issues between 1977-1982). Some, like **PINS**, and the Manchester-based **Annual Review of Critical Psychology** (founded in 1999 – see advert in this issue of **PINS**) still struggle to survive. What this points to is the difficulty of sustaining a stance of critique and social engagement in psychology, world-wide, and not only in South Africa. Critical ideas need all the help they can get, and so on this occasion of **PINS**'s *twentieth* anniversary we hope that a new generation of intellectuals and scholars will keep alive the legacy, independence, and commitment to critique that has characterised **PINS** since its founding in 1983.

As part of **PINS**'s ongoing self-reflection there are a few changes that have taken place over the course of this year. Certain long-serving editors – Andy Dawes, Gillian Eagle, and Vernon Solomon - have moved on to other projects. We thank them for their contribution to **PINS** over the years, and wish them well in their future ventures. During the course of 2004 the editorial team will be expanded as new members join. As a source of some irritation and amusement to the editors, **PINS** has finally joined the ranks of “educational respectability” – the Department of Education has now decided that **PINS** qualifies as a SAPSE accredited journal – one wonders what took them so long! *Editorials* in future issues of **PINS** will be the occasion for making *particular* interventions, and will no longer be the norm as a way of introducing the articles in a current issue. All articles will in future will carry a 150 word abstract to serve this purpose.

So after 20 years of independent publishing, it seems appropriate to conclude:
viva PINS viva.

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