

# Relevance and all that: PINS at 30

So, **Psychology In Society (PINS)** is 30 years old now.

**Anonymous**  
South Africa

I have always admired the journal, mostly for the obvious reason – namely that it publishes politically engaged and theoretically sophisticated material rather than the paint-by-numbers empirical junk that fills the pages of most other journals in psychology. But more than that, I have also always loved **PINS** for its steadfast quirkiness – produced on a near-zero budget and purveying deeply scholarly Marxist, Foucaultian, Lacanian analyses alongside occasionally entirely fresh new perspectives apparently thumb-sucked by undergraduates (with the authorship cheekily given as “anonymous”).

In many ways **PINS** has been bound up with the personality of its founding editor, Grahame Hayes. I am a little afraid of Grahame – he is so obviously erudite and so obviously does not have any patience for second-rate work. There is something a little prickly and awkward about **PINS** and its editor – they do not suffer fools gladly. Yet I have also on many occasions seen them nurture the work of promising young authors, taking a broad view of what constitutes quality, and more than willing to fly in the face of convention.

For 30 years, **PINS** has been a prick of conscience for South African psychology, a kind of disciplinary paraesthesia for social and theoretical limbs that have for too long been cut off from circulation. **PINS** has shown that a psychology that tries to really, actually, truthfully speak about the world we live in can be a respectable enterprise – intrinsically so. And in more recent years (as **PINS** gained recognition as an accredited journal and as many of those who grew up reading it and publishing in it became established figures in organized psychology) **PINS** has also become something of a respectable and respected institution in South African psychology.

**PINS** started as a journal loudly and fearlessly protesting the injustices of apartheid South Africa, but always with an ideological grounding that went beyond mere liberal anti-racism. So when apartheid came to an end and the residual (or

perhaps real, underlying) injustices that were about more than just race had to be confronted, the journal was well-positioned to continue along the path of critiquing the political and psychological status quo (with perhaps just a little bit of fancy editorial footwork required).

However, although **PINS** could probably continue with “business as usual” indefinitely, South Africa, the world and psychology is changing and my hope is that in response to these changes **PINS** will grow into a new identity rather than merely holding onto what it currently is.

First and foremost there is the question of who and what the journal, as a critical journal, is set up in opposition to. Although **PINS** has always encouraged a variety of perspectives, the broad target of most of the critiques published in the journal was clear: Politically they were engaged in a battle against racism, fascism and human rights abuses; on a disciplinary level they were at war with crude psychologism and methodolatry. These enemies have not gone away, but things have become a lot murkier. Racism (together with other forms of intolerance) is still central to South African and international politics, but now in the form of complex layers of intolerance, exclusion and resentment rather than straightforward oppression. Economic issues have, rightly, moved into the spotlight, but again there is no clear-cut enemy: It is easy to be critical of fat-cat capitalists (and of the corrupt political class that are parasitic on them) and rhetorically to side with the poor (or to produce abstruse analyses of how all of this fits together), but the truth is that few if any of us really have much of an idea of how the system works or of how to replace it with something better.

In terms of the discipline of psychology and its supposed methods, things have also become less clear-cut. Critical psychology and its attendant analytic methodologies continue to produce work that feels so much more nuanced and true to life than the individualizing and scientific forms of psychology that occupy the mainstream. Yet somehow critical psychology seems to have run out of steam – possibly because it has failed to establish a viable political practice – so that many of its adherents have now become more interested in individual therapeutic issues or have started to hanker back to a “real”, “hard-nosed” scientific psychology.

I do not know how **PINS**'s identity will change in the face of these challenges, but I certainly hope that it will continue to oppose the powers that be and their false certainties, that it will continue to be quirky. I also hope that it will do two quite bold, and perhaps risky, things.

First, I hope that **PINS** will nurture and publish more work that deals with African psychology and with psychology in Africa – not as some kind of romantic escape from the realities of present-day, post-colonial, post-apartheid South Africa, but precisely as an engagement with it. Too little of the work associated with the current resurgence in African psychology seems to be finding its way to **PINS**, in part (dare I say it?) because **PINS** is still perceived as the place where once upon a time lefty-whitey psychologists could feel comfortable debating “relevance”.

Second, I hope that in its business operations **PINS** does not succumb to the temptations of selling out to capitalist interests. It is a travesty that so many journals continue to be imprisoned behind giant corporations' pay-walls (or to charge exorbitant page fees) and that so many otherwise critical academics seem to be afraid of publishing independently from long established, “respectable” (but in fact rapacious) publishing houses. For most academic journals, most of the labour (done by authors, reviewers and editors) is free, and electronic distribution of journals is to all intents and purposes also free. For some time now **PINS** has been available in print form, as well as a free electronic publication. Long may this continue!