

Musings and memories: 30 years of Psychology In Society

Warmest congratulations on the 30th birthday of **Psychology in society**. It is indeed a considerable achievement. For any independent journal still to be alive, and to have produced 45 issues over the past 30 years is meritorious and even more so through this period of the hegemony of neo-liberalism in which publishing is characterised by mergers, takeovers, increasing profit-margins and bullying tactics of the big houses. The early days of **PINS** showed a lovely self-awareness of its fragility, when the second issue dated January 1985 nervously said: “The history of ‘little journals’ is littered with many an introductory volume” that is fat with promises but disappears soon after. Bravely it went on: “But with Issue 2, event becomes process, the one-off becomes a series”. Clearly this was **PINS** punching above its weight pretty well from the start. Now the series has grown to 46 with this 2014 issue; nearing middle age or perhaps already past it.

Beginnings

The “little journal” first appeared as a Foundation Edition in September 1983, produced by an editorial team of nine people from two regions Johannesburg and Durban. Cape Town only came on board from issue Number 3: slow, as befits the stereotype. Issue Number 45 in 2013 also had nine persons listed on the masthead, an editor and eight associate editors. In this respect it has remained a “little journal”; even if its influence has now become far more firmly established. In the early years the idea was that the journal production would be rotated among the three regional teams – a way of stretching and sharing limited skills and resources. For example, Cape Town produced issues number 5 (1986), 8 (September 1987) and 11 (December 1988). This practice had ceased by Issue Number 13 in 1990 when the primary editorial responsibility was given to Grahame Hayes who for many years, until Issue Number 31 in 2005, wrote an editorial piece, pulling the contents of each issue together.

The foundation year 1983 was a significant one for South African politics. The apartheid state pushed through the Tricameral Parliament, a constitutional amendment, in a farcical attempt to co-opt coloured and Indian groups while excluding Africans entirely. In reaction and resistance two new political groupings

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were formed: the United Democratic Frony (UDF) and the National Forum after which anti-apartheid activism intensified through the 1980s. The state security response was draconian: troops in the townships, emergency regulations, tens of thousands were detained under multiple provisions, show trials of selected leaders, widespread police brutality, many were tortured and activists were assassinated (including David Webster on 1 May 1989; **PINS** published a tribute in Issue 13, 1990).

South Africa of the 1980s was effectively in a state of civil war, stretching its tentacles into all the neighbouring states of southern Africa. It also permeated all aspects of life and even children became embroiled as targets, as victims, and at times as participants, as evidenced during the large *International Conference on Children, Repression and the Law* held in Harare, September 1987. That conference also doubled as a meeting ground between activists from inside South Africa and leaders of the African National Congress (ANC). The ANC along with Black Consciousness organisations were outlawed, their publications illegal and silenced, while most leaders were banned, restricted, imprisoned or exiled. Others were ceaselessly on the run from security police. Capitalism was quite content to play along with apartheid and indeed benefitted considerably from the low wages, migrant labour, influx-control, state repression, zero education conditions. Rates of return for capitalists were considerably high through the 1960s and 1970s until the Soweto uprisings of 1976. It was a unitary system: racial capitalism. Such were the social conditions when the “little journal” aired its fledgling voice.

What was the situation regarding organised psychology in South Africa when **PINS** began singing? Organised psychology had been divided since 1961 when the Sielkundige Instituut van die Republiek van Suid Afrika (SIRSA) split off from SAPA (South African Psychological Association, founded 1948) on political grounds to maintain a racial clause for membership; no black people could become members of SIRSA. In 1974 the Medical, Dental and Supplementary Health Service Professions Act, No 56 of 1974 established grounds for the professional status for psychologists, albeit under control of the Medical Council. Professionalism became the lure for unity; the divided houses of psychology became an encumbrance as between 1978 and 1982 the two groups met for joint conferences. It took five years of negotiations before SIRSA was prepared to drop its racial clause (the minimum requirements for unity), but in September 1982 in Bloemfontein a merger took place to form the new Psychological Association of South Africa (PASA). Yet the very next year the desired unity (to facilitate dealings with the Professional Board) was again disturbed by the formation of OASSSA (the Organisation for Appropriate Social Services in South Africa). The trigger for this more critical group came in 1983 when the Institute for Family Therapy held a conference at Sun City in a Bantustan. Since the “homeland” or Bantustan policy was responsible for the disintegration of families – due to the migrant labour system – it was indeed supremely insensitive to hold a family therapy conference at Sun City, also a hotbed of gambling. The Johannesburg grouping who opposed this shindig (mainly senior postgraduate students from Wits) established OASSSA to strive towards more suitable mental health services and provisions. OASSSA was not limited to psychologists and was more concerned to attract workers in broader fields of social services, but psychologists certainly comprised some of its membership. OASSSA also began to organise nationally and by the second half of the 1980s held regular national conferences. **PINS** and OASSSA remained separate and independent structures, but in practice a number of activists became involved with both new initiatives. OASSSA continued in parallel with **PINS** for the next decade until 1993 when the former was subsumed into a larger health and social service structure. In practice, its activities disappeared after PsySSA was formed early in 1994.

The aims and intentions of the new journal were succinctly set out in the extended collaborative

Editorial in the Foundation Edition. The critical frame was two-pronged: an epistemological criticism of positivism and an ontological criticism of individualism characteristic both of capitalism and of mainstream psychology. In its initial statement the apartheid issue was secondary to the examination of “psychology in capitalist society”. Only with **PINS 5** did the masthead statement become explicitly anti-apartheid. Intentions from the outset were to investigate “theory and practice” of the mainstream psychology drawn from the Anglo-American world. Whose interests were served by mainstream psychology? The question is still valid. Of concern was the psychological realm (not psychology in a narrow or parochial sense), therefore the journal was open to contributions from other fields or disciplines. The general aim was to work towards a substantive progressive psychological theory and practice. On pages 17 and 18 of the Foundation Edition the journal encouraged critical examinations of:

- mainstream South African psychology
- theoretical positions which inform psychology
- historical developments in psychology
- the relationship between personality and society (debates on “human nature”)
- method in psychological research (criticism, alternatives to positivism)
- professionalism and its problems in the local context
- ideological practices in psychology, “especially regarding race, class and the position of women and their relationship to psychology”.

These areas were not to be seen as exhaustive but rather as a “series of critical concerns” for the future. A key statement of the **PINS** position was (p 17) that we “cannot view the theory and practice of psychology in isolation from society as a whole”. Further insight into the **PINS** position is to be found in the Hayes reply in **PINS 2**. It suggests, quite wisely, that even if apartheid was entirely swept away, still problems would persist with research because there are other more tenacious material relations which shape the practice of social research. It is an early signal that a challenge to apartheid would not be sufficient; few, even to the present time, have fully grasped this line of critique.

Psychology in society coverage over three decades

What has actually appeared in the 30 years and 45 issues? Clearly the journal has succeeded admirably as a forum for publication, “for polemic, discussion and debate” (**PINS 1**, p 16). Most of the areas set out in the general aims have been covered at least to some extent. Probably the least covered are those areas pertaining to history and to person/society relations. Despite initial aims, the issue of psychology in capitalist society ends up as perhaps the least probed area of all over the 45 issues, apart from a few isolated efforts. Since emphases changed over time it might be more helpful to present coverage separately for each decade.

The first decade: Anti-apartheid

Not surprisingly it was a raft of apartheid related matters that dominated the first decade until the first democratic elections in April 1994 and the formation of the Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA) also in 1994. One key focus of concern involved state violence and repression, township resistance, militarisation and all its consequences including the practice of counselling under such circumstances. Political detention, restrictions and torture and its consequences in terms of trauma as well as theorising trauma for local conditions all received some attention. Rethinking post-traumatic stress disorder in a less individualistic manner was highlighted: the concept of continuous stress was mooted as one alternative. The question of trauma among children in response to state violence as well as to gender and sexual abuse was considered in a number of pieces. Questions involved how to think of trauma without involving secondary

victimisation. Childhood under apartheid was covered in a couple of book reviews. Military violence, conscription and related matters were brought to attention. A number of younger contributors were involved with the End Conscription Campaign, a resistance movement.

A second area involving a range of papers and reviews concerned itself with mental health practices, training, professionalisation and its difficulties, the role of indigenous healers, the place of psychoanalysis and the merits of community and primary health care approaches. In other words there was concern and debate about *practice*: what kind of practice was appropriate for the warlike conditions in the 1980s and for a future region freed from racial oppression and with many and varied languages and cultural streams? There were comparative studies of Nicaragua and Zimbabwe. OASSSA was involved in trying all sorts of new community-based approaches with support for detainees and victim/survivors of state violence and learned many lessons. There were campaigns with other health NGOs for improvements of services. These issues of appropriate mental health services, non-oppressive therapy and the like remained on the **PINS** roll call.

In a third major area – the only time capitalism was roundly engaged – there were about 10 pieces up to about 1990 on black workers, organised labour, unemployment, alienation and the politics of industrial psychology. There was a review of the major work on poverty by Wilson and Ramphela. There were touches of work on class-related issues. Psychology was properly criticised as serving the interests of racial capitalism. There was important work here, all in the early years: it is a pity it was neither sustained nor extended. However a challenge was laid down.

The first decade also saw attention to other matters. There was a special issue on psychoanalysis (**PINS 14** in 1990). Contributions to psychoanalytic theory also appeared, here and there, in other numbers. Worries about racism were touched on. Attention was given to two important black writers Paulin Hountondji and Chabani Manganyi. A few articles used materialism as a mode of analysis. A number of papers touched on alternative methods for research. There were touches of historical studies such as the Carnegie Commission of the 1930s (**PINS 6**) and the National Health Report of 1944 (**PINS 18**). There were pieces and reviews on political resistance and struggle. There was some concern with Africanisation and theoretical implications. There were studies of sexual abuse, rape and consequences and feminist perspectives. All in all it was a robust first decade, blooding a bunch of new activists.

The second decade: Transition

Democracy in South Africa at last. The elections of April 1994 were a great success. International doors were thrown open; the academic boycott was ended. By 1996 there was a new Constitution with heavy emphasis on human rights, but with clauses permitting affirmative action. The Truth Commission (TRC) was underway. The same year also saw the new Mandela government switch direction and adopt a neo-liberal macro-economic policy which produced steady growth but exacerbated inequality. It is clear now that South Africa has made little progress in solving major problems of unemployment, poverty (despite some 16 million citizens now on state grants of some form) and inequality. Notwithstanding enormous social change in this decade, deeper faultlines of capitalist structures showed continuities with the past.

During this decade of transition, the “little journal” fruitfully marked the changes on the terrain of psychology and of wider society. Here are some of these shifts and events:

- 1994 – Formation of PsySSA, and later of Psychology, Politics, Resistance in the UK (**PINS 18 & PINS 19**)
- 1995 – Conference on mental health policy in Cape Town (**PINS 21**); commentary on psychology on the internet (**PINS 20**)

- 1996 – First of the WITS qualitative methods conferences (**PINS 21**)
- 1997 – Publication of Mental Health Policy Issues for South Africa (not covered in **PINS**)
- 1997 – Second Wits qualitative methods conference (see **PINS 27**)
- 1998 – Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC); conferences and debate on the idea of an African Renaissance (**PINS 23 & PINS 26**)
- 1998 – Conference on the TRC and mental health (Bellville, Medical Research Council)
- 1998 – International Psychoanalytic Conference in April, Cape Town (**PINS 23**)
- 1998 – Special issue: Social approaches to HIV/AIDS (**PINS 24**)
- 2000 – Special issue: On the TRC (**PINS 26**)
- 2001 – Special issue: Critical psychology (**PINS 27**, a bumper issue of 157 pages)
- 2001 – Reflections on the series of WITS qualitative methods conferences (**PINS 27**)
- 2003 – 20th anniversary of the “little journal” (**PINS 29**: “viva PINS viva”)

In terms of themes, there was certainly continuity from the first decade with a number of articles and reviews on psychoanalysis, and on mental health practices, policies and education. Some debate on Africanisation continued. But in the second decade there was greater attention to gender, sexuality, HIV/AIDS, male violence and a more firm turn to the label of critical psychology. In the mid 1990s there were further changes in the editorial statement to “post-apartheid” and an emphasis on a “socio-historical and critical theory perspective”. Discursive approaches established themselves more solidly in the nineties appearing in a number of articles and debate around the Levett et al 1997 edited book: **Culture, power and difference**. Vygotskian theory was given a useful airing in the twin articles by Ronnie Miller. The special issue on critical psychology in 2001 would be considered a major contribution. Finally, the end of the decade saw the departure of three long serving members of the editorial team: Andy Dawes, Gill Eagle and Vernon Solomon. Our thanks and appreciation.

The third decade: Expansion

The decade from 2004 to 2013 saw increased diversification and expansion of areas with new attention to the study of masculinities (Special issues, **PINS 35 & PINS 36**), of disabilities (**PINS 35**), migration research (**PINS 37**), the work of Ian Parker, and reflections on the Marxism and psychology conferences. The area of “race” and racism was more thoroughly canvassed than previously, with a special issue (**PINS 31**), the superb 2005 book by Durrheim & Dixon (**PINS 42**), revisiting Manganyi’s work (**PINS 41**), a return to some Fanonian perspectives, Durrheim’s 2011 book Race trouble (see **PINS 42**) and a number of pertinent articles. Sadly there were obituaries: of Ann Levett (**PINS 33**), Siyanda Ndlovu and Alan Flisher (**PINS 39**), all had made considerable contributions to South African psychology and are sorely missed. There were two reviews of the “landmark” 2004 edited volume by Hook et al, **Critical Psychology**, all of its 657 pages (**PINS 32**). The usual suspects were also there: coverage of psychoanalysis, gender, sexuality, male violence, sexual abuse, the TRC, discourse analysis, AIDS and consideration of various research methods, texts and approaches. There were the beginnings of a retrospective analysis of apartheid and a return, through historical lenses, of the old 80s issue of “relevance” in South African psychology (**PINS 40 & PINS 43**). The book reviews were many, varied and sumptuous. Towards the end of the decade both Catriona Macleod and Cathy Campbell stood down as associate editors; our full appreciation to these two important figures.

The book reviews

These have been a notable and grand feature of the “little journal”, starting in the Foundation Edition with a review of the Russell Jacoby (1975) classic, **Social amnesia**. In recent years the

number has increased, perhaps averaging about five each issue with a record ten reviews in **PINS 42** in 2011. In general these reviews have been useful, informative, of high quality, searching and at times quite tough and demanding. Thanks to all the reviewers. It is harder work than many might imagine.

These book reviews carry quite an historical record, since most of the important local book publications (there are a few exceptions) have been covered here. It therefore provides a rolling record for South African publications on the terrain of psychology and mental health and related fields. It is quite striking that in the early years there were very few local books. That situation changed quite clearly from about 1990, although somewhat unevenly through the nineties. From year 2000 and through the noughties there has been a steady stream of new books and the range of topics has widened. Most have been reviewed in **Psychology in society**. Students of psychology and the social sciences are far better served with a range of materials from thoughtfully critical South African researchers and authors. Here is a piece waiting for the efforts of some intrepid scholar; a review of all the books on psychology since 1980 by South African writers. You will find most of the material in **PINS**.

The people

Enough of the journal. Now something about the people behind the journal. One person stands out. He is the only one who has been present unchanged from number one to number 45, for the full 30 years. One can see the handiwork of Grahame Hayes in the Foundation Edition and in **Number 2** he is everywhere. From year 1990 Grahame has single-handedly been the Editor of the “little journal” and has produced every issue to the present, also writing the introductory editorials continuously through to 2005 and **PINS 32** when there was a change of style. To mix seafaring metaphors horribly (apologies), Grahame has been our anchor, our rudder, the wind in the sails, and our giant steering wheel. He has done nearly all the hard work. He has been the captain of the vessel. We have only reached the 30th birthday because of Grahame. He has battled to get accreditation: at last obtained in 2003 at age 20! He has battled money problems, but ultimately kept the journal afloat. He has not been properly recognised. We do so now, belatedly. Thank you very much indeed Grahame, for everything and more.

It is true that **PINS** has served as a sort of apprenticeship for young writers. If you look back to the early editions up to the end of the 1980s all the names that appear have gone on to senior positions in many South African universities. Some went in other directions. Two in the early editorial teams went on to become ANC cabinet ministers: Jean Benjamin and Blade Nzimande. Two contributors went on to hold senior positions in the new government Department of Health: Yogan Pillay and Mel Freeman. Others remained active in significant NGOs. Cheryl de la Rey became head of the University of Pretoria. Many carved successful careers abroad: Rai Turon, Clint Fullager, Cyril Couve, Cathy Campbell, Kerry Gibson, Gill Straker, more recently Derek Hook. We have been fortunate to have good friends and notable contributors from abroad and elsewhere: Erica Burman, Ian Parker, Robert Young, Len Bloom, Tony Reeler. Many of the more important works on South African psychology have been produced by those closely linked to the little journal. We have also sadly lost some of our own “family”: Jean Benjamin, Alastair Bentley, Alan Flisher, Ann Levett, Victor Nell, Siyanda Ndlovu, David Webster. We remember and salute you. Some have served faithfully for long spells on the editorial team: thanks.

Psychology in society has made a terrific contribution. Long may it keep going. Happy birthday to **Psychology in society** and many more. Thank you Grahame Hayes. Longlive **PINS!** Longlive!