

Introducing Chabani Manganyi’s “Making strange”

Chabani Manganyi’s little known article, “Making strange: Race science and ethnopsychiatric discourse”, doesn’t need an introduction as it is quite capable of speaking for itself. And while originally written in 1984, it is still able to speak to us about the important contemporary concerns of race (science), (African) identity, the postcolonial, and even the politics of de-colonisation. Manganyi’s article was first presented at the University of Essex’s conference on the “Sociology of literature” in July 1984. He then presented it again on his return to South Africa at the University of the Witwatersrand’s African Studies Institute in October 1984. It was published in 1985 as part of the conference proceedings by the University of Essex. This somewhat obscure publishing history has given the paper a samizdat quality, being passed from reader to reader in its African Studies Institute’s photocopied version! Even Chabani Manganyi himself doesn’t have a copy of this article (Hook, 2018).

Sadly, this seems to be the story of many of Manganyi’s writings and publications, as most of his early books are out of print and difficult to get hold of, even through second-hand outlets (see Manganyi, 1973, 1977a, 1977b, 1981, 1983, & 1991), where the price of these volumes is often in hundreds of pounds. Fortunately, Wits University Press is currently in the process of re-publishing Manganyi’s seminal text of 1973, **Being-black-in-the-world**. Concerned about the neglect of this major scholar and the unavailability of many of his texts, **PINS (Psychology in society)** has been interested to bring his work to the attention of our readers, and especially younger academics and intellectuals who may not be aware of his prodigious output. To this end **PINS** re-published Manganyi’s “The violent reverie: The

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unconscious in literature and society” in 2011. And then in 2016, on the occasion of the publication of his memoir entitled, **Apartheid and the making of a Black Psychologist**, **PINS** published a range of commissioned responses to this remarkable text (see **PINS 52**, 2016). This book was recently awarded ASSAf’s (Academy of Science of South Africa) biennial Humanities Book Award for 2018.

And so an obvious motivation for re-publishing Manganyi’s “Making strange” is simply to have it more readily available again. The other more serious motivation relates to the extraordinary scholarship of the article in its complex critique of the “scientific” discourses of racial othering that Manganyi finds in ethnopsychiatry all the way from Freud to Simon Biesheuvel. This article shows that Manganyi was at the cutting edge of debates about the politics and epistemology of subject formation in the postcolony. And in the words of Derek Hook (2018), who first suggested that **PINS**, should re-publish this article, “In fact what was most impressive to me and also historically important was the fact that while various of the intellectuals associated with the whole postcolonial turn in the late 80s – especially Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Robert Young, and more cultural studies scholars associated with the return to Fanon like Stuart Hall, Kobena Mercer, etc – were duly celebrated, there was very little mark on the cultural/historical landscape to indicate that a black South African intellectual, and psychologist at that – had been associated with, or a part of, such an important conference.” The lack of recognition of Manganyi’s contribution in these debates in the 1980s is all the more galling, given that amongst those making a call for de-colonisation in the spheres of (historical) knowledge production, Manganyi’s name does not feature alongside those of Fanon, Biko, Said, and Walter Mignolo, for instance. Clearly Manganyi was a sophisticated “de-colonial” reader long before this term and practice became fashionable!

There is much to be got out of a careful reading of Manganyi’s “Making strange”, and I’ll leave it to readers to discover these insights for themselves. As a stimulus to what Manganyi’s article might mean, or evoke, for a contemporary readership, **PINS** has published three sets of commentary in this issue, by Ross Truscott, Peace Kiguwa and Puleng Segalo, and Derek Hook.

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