

# A brief history of PINS

The early 1980s was a vibrant and tumultuous time in South Africa as increasing challenges to the apartheid government were being mounted from all angles of the society. The state and its security forces were cracking down on anti-apartheid activists through large-scale detentions, and in turn individuals and organisations were responding with a combination of defiance and organized resistance in the formation of community-based organisations. The highpoint of this organizational development was the formation of the UDF (United Democratic Front) in 1983 (20 August 1983 in the Western Cape), and COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) in 1985 (1 December 1985 in Durban).

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The academic world, not known for its political activism, was also stirring during this time. Marxist and other radical approaches were in the ascendancy in the disciplines of Sociology, especially Industrial Sociology, History, Politics, Anthropology and English to name a few. Academic Psychology was still in thrall to neo-positivist approaches and in pursuit of a value-free “science of mental life”. Many in mainstream Psychology in South Africa were concerned about the “contamination” of scientific psychological research through any involvement in politics. The politics espoused by the psychological mainstream tended to be liberal and anti-apartheid in its condemnation of the Nationalist governments’ policies and practices. However, the theory and practice of Psychology was kept separate from the turmoil of the streets and the townships.

Young academics and senior students in Psychology who had been radicalized by the youth uprising of Soweto 1976, the predominantly white student politics of NUSAS (National Union of South African Students), and the Black Consciousness movements, were reluctant

to accept the separation of politics and Psychology that dominated the Psychology departments of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The first **Psychology in Society** Editorial in 1983 made the point that “[t]here can be no doubt that psychological theory and political and social practice are intimately part of one another, no matter what the psychological establishment might think. The theoretical products of psychology are put to use in schools, prisons, hospitals and the factory floor” (p 2). Given that senior faculty in many Psychology departments were not receptive to these ideas and often were patronizingly defensive in their engagement with young academics and senior students, a need arose for a forum to debate the complicity of Psychology with apartheid and capitalist social relations. Discussions were thus started between groups of junior staff and senior students at the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Natal (Durban) about creating some forum to address what were seen as urgent and critical questions about the theory and practice of Psychology in apartheid South Africa. After many months of debate and discussion it was decided to launch a journal as a forum to critique the theory and practice of Psychology in South Africa, and at the same time advance thinking about how Psychology might positively contribute to overcoming the crippling inequalities inherent in apartheid society. Thus, in September 1983 the first edition of **Psychology in Society** was produced by a small group of staff and students from Johannesburg and Durban. The Editorial masthead stated: “**Psychology in Society** is a journal which aims to critically explore and present ideas on the nature of psychology in capitalist society. There is a special emphasis on the theory and practice of psychology in the South African context”.

The journal has become known by its abbreviation as **PINS** since 1989 and it is worth noting that the title itself, psychology *in society*, was a political statement of sorts. Asserting that some phenomenon, like psychology, exists *in society* is so obvious and superfluous that it hardly needs stating. The obviousness of locating psychology *in society* was against a backdrop of the psychology mainstream in South Africa during the 1980s that was firmly in the grip of a psychology “floating” above the flotsam and jetsam of social issues, and seemingly uncontaminated by the polluting ideologies of politics. Mainstream academic psychology positioned itself “above”, not *in*, society as it pursued its research programmes according to value-neutral scientific principles. South African establishment Psychology during the apartheid 1980s defined (and in many instances, psychology around the world, still defines) itself as a *science*, and thus saw itself as separate from the political vicissitudes of everyday life.

The second issue of the journal only came out 16 months after the first, in January 1985. This second issue was again produced by a group of editors from Johannesburg and Durban. In the editors’ initial discussions it was hoped that two issues per year would be produced. Given that the journal throughout most of its 40 year history has

had no infrastructural support and has been produced entirely independently by the “free labour” of the editors, it has always been difficult to maintain a highly regular production schedule. By the time the third issue appeared in September 1985 an editor from Cape Town had joined the editorial group. As a way of coping with the workload of producing an independent and non-funded journal, from **Psychology in Society 4** (1985), until **Psychology in Society 11** (1988) each editorial group would take turns in producing an issue of the journal, rotating between Johannesburg, Durban, and Cape Town. This practice was stopped in 1989 – **Psychology in Society 12** (1989) – and the *production* became centralised in the Durban Editorial Group, with Johannesburg and Cape Town maintaining their central and active editorial roles. To further improve the editorial coherence of the journal an editor was appointed in 1992 (**PINS 16**), and the editors around the country became associate editors. This practice has been maintained to date. All these editorial changes in the first 10 years of the journal’s operation were instituted in the interest of sustaining the journal under difficult practical circumstances. Another “survival mechanism” that the journal adopted to deal with the workload was producing *special issues* under the editorship of the special issue editor/s. Starting in 1998 with a special issue on HIV/AIDS (**PINS 24**) up until the second special issue on climate change (**PINS 64**) in 2022, **PINS** has produced a total of 13 special issues.

Besides lightening the workload the special issues also allowed **PINS** to focus on important social issues (for instance racism, critical psychology, African psychologies) and issues that have not received the critical scholarly attention that they deserve (Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe, the Apartheid Archive, social cohesion in post-apartheid South Africa). Since its inception **Psychology in Society** has always been responsive to the changing socio-historical conditions under which it has operated. This is reflected in continually updating its editorial brief over the years.

While in the first issue there was no explicit mention of *apartheid* in the editorial masthead, the editorial article did mention that “**Psychology in Society** has been conceived by a group of South African psychologists who share a general critique of that network of ideas and practices that has come to be known as ‘psychology’ in the Anglo-American world. In particular, we share a concern as South Africans about the uses and abuses to which ‘psychology’ is put in the maintenance of apartheid and other forms of social oppression in this country. And it is precisely this deficiency in mainstream psychology publishing (and thinking) that has prompted the editors of this journal to bring out a new dimension to psychological debate in South Africa.” (Editorial Group, 1983: 2) The somewhat (purist) influence of left intellectuals, Marxists in particular, was evident in the phrasing or framing of the social nature of society in the masthead as “capitalist society”. However, two years later, in 1985 (**PINS 3**), the masthead was changed to read: **Psychology in Society** “aims to critically explore and present ideas on

the nature of psychology in *apartheid and* capitalist society. There is a special emphasis on the theory and practice of psychology in the South African context”.

The reasons for adding “apartheid” were twofold: firstly, to explicitly indicate that **PINS** was anti-apartheid, or at least to alert its readers and (prospective) authors to a political commitment against a psychology establishment that made no mention of the context of apartheid that psychology was practised in. And secondly, to soften the implied Marxist orientation by a focus on a critique of *capitalist* society. While some of the editors were openly Marxist in their approach, the same could not be said for most psychologists, even those committed to an anti-apartheid struggle, and hence **PINS** was concerned to appeal to a broad alliance of progressive forces in psychology, and not only left radicals.

The above editorial position served **PINS** well until the democratic elections of 1994, when it became necessary to re-think the direction of the journal given the formal and official demise of apartheid, and the beginnings of the transition to a new society, and especially seeing as South Africa had legitimately become part of Africa. **PINS** reflected these changes in its editorial by making two slight, yet telling, “additions”. The masthead in 1994 (**PINS 18**) was changed to read: “**Psychology in society (PINS)** aims to critically explore and present ideas on the nature of psychology in *post-apartheid and capitalist* society. There is a special emphasis on the theory and practice of psychology in the *southern* African context”.

A significant outcome of the democratic government was to remove the pariah status of South Africa within continental Africa. Although **PINS** struggled to appeal to a readership and authorship beyond the confines of South Africa, there was still a concern about merely being a parochial South African journal! But given the state of psychology within southern African countries, it is likely that **PINS** will remain a South African journal for the foreseeable future, and yet hopefully with a (*southern*) African consciousness. The change in the **PINS** editorial masthead from apartheid to *post-apartheid*, might be seen as the more problematic alteration. At one level this change could be read as merely descriptive of the new democratic society of 1994, namely, literally, *post-apartheid*. The editorial reasoning behind this modification was an attempt to capture some of the *social* dynamics involved in the transition to a post-apartheid socio-economic and political order. The impact of nearly 50 years of apartheid rule on ordinary people’s lives, and the continuing effect that this was likely to have well into the years of the post-apartheid society, was the rationale in designating the social order as *analytically, post-apartheid*. It was **PINS**’s contention that the effects of apartheid ran deep in the society, in peoples’ everyday practices and experiences, and marked them in psychological ways that were important to study.

The 1990s were an exciting and difficult decade as many of the intellectual and political formations that had existed during apartheid had to re-position themselves in relation to the new democratic society, and the political hegemony of the ANC. It was in this period (1994-1996) that **PINS (Psychology in society)** continued to tinker with its editorial statement in the hope of reflecting a new social reality that was emerging in the country, along with the serious tasks of social reconstruction of post-apartheid democratic South Africa that needed to be undertaken. There was also a concern to locate **PINS** both locally and internationally, and so to be of interest to critical intellectuals beyond South Africa. Thus the final adjustment to the **PINS** editorial statement was changed in late 1996 (PINS 21) to read: “*Psychology in society (PINS) aims to foster a socio-historical and critical theory perspective, by focusing on the theory and practice of psychology in the southern African context.*”

For 40 years **Psychology in Society (PINS)** has promoted a Psychology responsive to the society it has found itself *in*, and at the same contributed to a body of knowledge necessary to imagine a different way of thinking about and doing Psychology.