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Entangled with Power: an editorial introduction

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It is important when editing a journal like PINS, to generate some thoughts on the collection of articles in each volume. It does more than introduce the articles. It helps readers to tie together and think about the significance of the volume. Moreover, it may give rise to ideas for our readership to engage with as debates raised in the editorial. Finally, it could spell out some ideas for further development. I provide a selection of thoughts and of course, you may generate more ideas, even in contributions to this journal. I will commit to doing an editorial more consistently, as we continue to produce work in this journal.

In this first volume of PINS for 2026, "Entangled with Power" names the thread running through all four articles. Each article treats psychology as inseparable from racial, colonial, institutional, or interpersonal power rather than as a neutral disciplinary enterprise.

Motloung's article is placed first because it grounds the issue empirically before the theoretical stakes are raised. Motloung interviews three South African academics from diverse backgrounds about how they talk about race, and her findings uncover an asymmetry. Intellectual fluency in the constructionist account of race does little to equalise how race is lived. The Black academic in her study speaks of race in personal, embodied, self-implicating terms while his White and Indian colleagues discuss it as external to themselves, an "ugliness" rather than a wound. It is perhaps a demonstration that the university's own knowledge-producers remain bifurcated by the very categories they claim, professionally, to have deconstructed. This is precisely the entrenchment her title names, and precisely the problem the rest of this issue tries, in different ways, to address.

Motloung shows how race is spoken about, whereas Simango asks us to re-conceive what is being spoken about when Blackness is foregrounded. She draws on Fanon, Wynter's sociogeny, Lewis Gordon, and the wider Black radical and Africana traditions to propose "Psychology in Black" as an analytic concept. This is not a diagnosis of deficiency, as colonial psychology so often rendered blackness but an account of the black psyche as an assemblage produced by intersecting forms of antiblackness and colonial metaphysics. Most valuable in this contribution is its refusal of a simple choice between deconstruction and construction. Simango aims to unbundle the ontological scripts imposed on blackness and from that unbundling, build a working model of black psychic structure. It is a structure in which history (violence, servitude, capitalist modernity) is internal to the psychological rather than merely its backdrop. It is dense work, and deliberately so. It asks the discipline to change its terms of engagement, not simply its case studies.

Olivier's article can perhaps be read as the anomaly of this edition, not quite fitting in. I have included it here rather than treating it as a digression. Olivier fuses Lacan's three registers; the real, the imaginary, the symbolic, with the ethical "alignments" of Dungeons & Dragons to build a heuristic for reading psychopathic and sociopathic subjects, testing it against fictional and real cases. The approach is playful and what Olivier is after is a finer-grained way of discriminating between subjects who share a dominant psychic register but diverge sharply in ethical orientation. He argues that it is a discrimination that neither Lacanian theory nor behavioural taxonomies like the DSM-5 achieve alone. Where the other papers in this issue are concerned with structural and racialised harm, Olivier's concern is with a different scale of adversary, the boardroom psychopath, the everyday antagonist. However, the underlying gesture, of building better conceptual tools for recognising what damages us, belongs to the same network of concerns.

Suffla's contribution is placed last because it functions, for me, as this issue's synthesising article. Recast from her inaugural lecture, Suffla writes as a Black scholar-activist inside the contradictions of the South African university. She is unwilling to let reflection substitute for practice. Her argument moves along two interwoven trajectories that include knowledge as accountability, articulated through reframing violence, cultivating "care-worlds," and enacting solidarities. In addition, methodologies of refusal and relation, articulated through refusal as stance, relation as praxis, and collective authorship are discussed as insurgent knowledge-making. She closes by returning to the university itself, read through what she calls emancipatory breaches; insurgent openings where collective accountability and the unfinished labour of liberation might still take hold. In naming the university as both the site of coloniality's persistence and the site of its possible undoing, Suffla gives institutional and practical form to what Motloung documents empirically and Simango theorises conceptually.

There are further similarities and tensions among the four articles. Some similarities relate to colonial structures as contemporary psychological activity and not historical vestiges and the university as both object and site of critique.

Colonial/apartheid structures as psychologically active, not historical residue

Motloung, Simango, and Suffla all treat coloniality and apartheid as forces still organising present-day psychic and institutional life rather than as a closed historical chapter. This occurs, whether in academics' racialised discourse, the ongoing construction of the black psyche, or the university's unfinished decolonial labour. Olivier's paper sits at a slight remove here, but even his "adversarial subject" heuristic assumes that harmful psychic structures persist and recur across contexts rather than being one-off aberrations.

The university as both object and site of critique

All four papers are, in some sense, self-implicating about the institution producing them. Motloung studies academics, Simango and Olivier are theoretical interventions explicitly aimed at reshaping how psychology as a discipline thinks and Suffla names the university directly as the space of both complicity and possible transformation. None treats the university as a neutral backdrop.

The two identified tensions (and there may be more) relate to the individual and structural scale and constructionism as diagnosis as opposed to constructionism as insufficient.

Individual/psychic scale vs. structural/historical scale

Olivier's paper operates largely at the level of individual characterology; diagnosing particular subjects' ethical orientation; while Simango and Suffla insist on structural and historical framing (colonial metaphysics, racial capitalism) as constitutive of the psychic itself. This creates a productive but real tension in the volume. Is the "adversarial" or harmful subject best understood through individual diagnostic heuristics, or only through the systems that produce differential harm? This collection of articles does not reconcile these scales, it juxtaposes them as is important in some debates.

Constructionism as diagnosis vs. constructionism as insufficient

Motloung's paper takes social constructionism as an adequate analytic lens but shows its practical limits (academics accept race is constructed yet still experience and enact it unequally). Simango and Suffla, by contrast, seem to treat constructionist language itself as too thin; reaching instead for ontological, metaphysical, and praxis-based vocabularies (sociogeny, epistemic accountability, refusal) to capture what mere "discourse" analysis misses. There's an implicit

disciplinary disagreement here about whether talk-based methods can ever adequately capture lived racial/colonial harm.

The question arises then as to what future work can be productive, if we consider this set of articles. Again, I will suggest three areas of possibilities, and there may be more, for future directions stemming directly from this work. They relate to empirical work, methodological extensions and perhaps cross-reading Olivier's heuristics with the issues of decolonial concern.

Empirical testing of "psychology in black" and liberatory community psychology

Simango's and Suffla's contributions are largely theoretical. A natural next step would be empirical studies (in the vein of Motloung's discourse analysis) that operationalise these frameworks for using "psychology in black" as an analytic lens on interview or narrative data, or documenting Suffla's "emancipatory breaches" as they occur in specific institutional case studies.

Extending Motloung's design

A larger sample across multiple institutions, disciplines, or generational cohorts could test whether the bifurcation she found is a stable pattern or specific to her three participants. A longitudinal design could also track whether explicit constructionist training changes discourse over time.

Cross-reading Olivier's heuristic with the issue's decolonial concerns

An intriguing but unexplored possibility is applying Olivier's Lacan-alignment heuristic to institutional or structural "adversarial subjects". This may mean analysing racist institutional actors or apartheid-era policy architects which would bridge his individual-scale framework with the structural concerns of the other three papers. Even though it was not Olivier's initial intention to do this, it may be interesting to explore this possibility.

Methodological dialogue across papers

Given the tension between discourse-based and praxis-based approaches noted above, future PINS work might explicitly stage a methodological conversation. What would a study look like that combines Motloung's discourse-analytic rigour with Suffla's praxis-oriented, collective-authorship approach?

Conclusion

I do indeed hope that some of my reflections here may stimulate some debate for contributions to PINS and that you may generate different ideas from a close reading of the articles in this collection.

Finally, it is important to let you know that all the PINS articles, dating back to the first edition published in 1983, are now available digitally on our platform (https://www.journals.ac.za/pins/about). It took much longer than I had anticipated. Initially I thought that it may take 18 months to 2 years to complete the process but it took a solid 4 years to ensure that all articles are in the digital collection. It is important, given the themes of this editorial, to celebrate this digitalisation as an epistemic victory and a small contribution to broadening access to knowledge generated in and from the Global South.