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Article

Three decades of psychology in South Africa: legacies of hope and fault lines of the future

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Abstract

Three decades have passed since South Africa's formal transition from apartheid to liberal democracy. This milestone signified a triumph of hope over despair for a country that had struggled under a suffocating system of racist, dehumanising oppression since its colonisation in the seventeenth century. Reflecting this zeitgeist, divisions, and complicities that had characterised the study, practice, and organisation of psychology within South Africa's racist structures were disassembled. The discipline committed to social justice, inclusive science, liberatory praxis, and global well-being. From a 30-year vantage point that many imagined would represent a clearer picture of a maturing and free rather than an emerging and new South African democracy, this article assesses the discipline's progress in achieving the socio-political, economic, health and psychological imperatives it set for itself in 1994. Through grounding this analysis in the 10 contributions that constitute this Special Issue, the article pits the promises of struggle and hope against the yields of democracy and its imagined freedoms. It argues that despite the unmistakable continuities of despair that define South African life and the discipline's response thereto, there are several discernible legacies of hope that psychology has recuperated in its journey thus far, and that these may offer fault lines for a hopeful future. These moments of hope are most powerful when the discipline seeks solidarity rather than solipsism, transcends rather than polices its epistemic and political boundaries, and embraces ordinariness through disavowing the exceptionalism that forecloses its connectedness to several overriding movements that prioritise planetary justice for all.

Keywords

Despair, hope, ordinariness, psychology, South Africa

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Introduction

Thirty years after his life sentence for sabotage,[1] Nelson Rolihlala Mandela was inaugurated as the first president of a democratic[2] South Africa. Mandela's installation to the seat of state power was heralded as a victory for planetary democracy - a triumph of hope over despair. As a reflection of this reconciliatory zeitgeist, the dogged divisions and complicities that had so profoundly characterised the study, practice, and organisation of psychology within South Africa's racist structures and legislation were formally disassembled. In recognising the enormous rates of racialised inequality and the devastating and traumatic impacts of centuries of dehumanising oppression and violence in South Africa, the expressly non-racial, anti-racist, and emphatically democratic Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA) was founded in January 1994 (Cooper & Nicholas, 2012). The endpoint of a troubled and contested but hopeful organisational process, PsySSA's constitution, perhaps echoing the hopes of a nation, committed South African psychology to social justice, inclusive science, liberatory praxis, and the well-being of all, while pledging to address the role that psychology has played in consolidating colonial and apartheid powers (Bowman et al., 2010). Although not representing all scholars and practitioners in and of South African psychology, PsySSA committed its resources to breaking from these oppressive disciplinary legacies and realising the horizon of collective hope that its formation promised.

Three decades have passed. The year of PsySSA's birth as part of South Africa's inauguration of hope lies midway between Mandela's incarceration and our present. Using this midpoint as a prism that bisects the forward-looking hope for a liberated South Africa, which found political form in 1994, and a collective gaze backwards across the 30 years since, this Special Issue pits the promises of struggle and hope against the yields of democracy and its freedoms. In so doing, it attempts to give voice and vigour to some of the complex questions that many psychologists – owing to an individualising and reductionist worldview to which much of psychology remains committed (Fisher, 2009; Seedat & Suffla, 2017) – do not consider theirs to answer. These are questions that are as much about the past as they are about the future. Has Mandela's now famous cherished 'ideal of a democratic and free society' (Cohen, 2009, p. 77) been realised some 30 years after the incumbent government promised 'a better life for all' (see Tsheola, 2002)? What is South African psychology and who represents its interests? What role has psychology as a body of knowledge, professional practice, and custodian of psychological well-being played in shaping the conditions of the global present against the hope that buoyed the birth of South African democracy? How has South African psychology located itself as part of the global networks that constitute its disciplinary and epistemic jurisdictions? What are the key lodestars and disciplinary fault lines that will define the science and practice of psychology in the next 30 years? Furthermore, what are the keystones that should guide South African psychology as it charts the course towards this future?

Readers should not look to this Special Issue for definitive answers to these questions. Instead, we might more fruitfully understand the articles in this Special Issue as operating alongside such questions – evoking, provoking, speculating, analysing, enunciating, and theorising in relation to them. Against the sorts of 'expert knowledge', hegemonic authority, and patriarchal mastery that characterise much psychological practice (Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018), the Special Issue represents a reflective and critical intervention, one that is guided and emboldened by these questions, encircling them from several viewpoints without claiming to settle them.

For every decade of democracy in South Africa, the SAJP has published a Special Issue reflecting on the state of psychology in the country (see Cooper, 2014; Suffla & Seedat, 2004). This is the third of these Special Issues. It claims as its vantage point the horizon of hope that many imagined would represent a clearer picture of a maturing and free rather than an emerging and new South African democracy. Together, the articles in this Special Issue offer what we believe to be a

meaningful appraisal of the state of psychology locally, regionally and globally across key moments characterised by continuity and discontinuity, reconciliation and contestation, despair, and perhaps also a modality of hope. They offer a critical scholarly engagement that not only troubles entrenched preoccupations and paradigms but also envisions transformative pathways for the reimagining of the discipline. To introduce the historical, social, disciplinary, and epistemological context that frames this Special Issue, we offer a brief outline of how systemic violence, institutionalised in South Africa's past, continues to shape its present, and what the role of psychology has been in its inertia. We then consider moments within which psychology in South Africa has operated in, for, and alongside visions of hope, and follow with an overview of the articles in this Special Issue, drawing out their significance in building a psychology within what so often seem to be conditions of hopelessness.

Continuities of despair

While our contemporary world has seen several seismic cultural and technological shifts, the stark structural inequalities both within and across nations continue to privilege some lives over others. This privileging is rooted in the hierarchical and racialised Chain of Being – where Western man is placed at the zenith of a gradation of humanity – that was violently imposed by colonial powers onto colonised populations (Wynter, 2003). The impacts of these differential weightings of life, of variable considerations of human beings' ontological density (see Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018), are complex but well documented. Racialised and spatialised inequalities are marked as fundamental to many of South Africa's most pressing challenges, including crime and violence, unemployment, and a sizable quadruple disease burden (de Villiers, 2021; Seedat et al., 2009).

After a decade of liberal democracy in South Africa, Suffla and Seedat (2004) forewarned that the shift towards economic policies that entailed a curtailment of social spending, increased privatisation, and greater financialisation presented a formidable challenge to the social and medical sciences' mandate to redress a deeply divided and unequal country. Before this hypothesis could be properly tested, years of state capture within the context of a global economic downturn left a devastated local economy in its wake, the burdens of which are suffered most acutely by South Africa's poor, marginalised, predominantly Black population. Hopeful visions of a more equal society that circulated in South Africa's earliest democratic years have all but been blotted out by a steady incline in inequality indicated by the contested but frequently used Gini coefficient, which increased from 59.3% in 1994 to 68% in 2015 (Mtapuri & Tinarwo, 2021), and has continued to mark South Africa as the most unequal nation on the planet.

The knock-on effects of poverty and inequality in South Africa are significant. Violence continues to plague the country. Despite steep decreases from an alarmingly high base of 60 per 100,000 population in 1994 and some reprieve in the early 2000s, at 45 homicides per 100,000 population in 2023 (Bruce, 2023), rates of violence are steadily increasing. Gender-based violence remains a blight on the country's commitment to gender equality, with 42,780 counts of rape being reported to the police in 2023. This is of course a dramatic underrepresentation of the prevalence of sexual violence in the country. Unemployment in South Africa is a critical and enduring challenge, with the 2024 rate at approximately 32.9%. (Statistics South Africa, 2024) The high unemployment rate contributes to poverty and inequality, further exacerbating social tensions and economic instability. These structural issues are a product of South Africa's economic and political commitment to a global neoliberal project that configures human life and well-being as inputs towards profit-making (Alexander, 2023; Bond, 2014). Although life expectancy has increased significantly from 55.8 years in 2000 to 61.5 years in 2021 (World Health Organization [WHO], 2024), due largely to the provision of affordable HIV treatments, good health favours rich South Africans. Indeed, South

Africa has been shown to demonstrate an especially robust health-wealth gradient (Ataguba et al., 2015). As such, the Human Development Index in South Africa has been stubbornly plateauing for a decade (Gumede, 2021). These systemic issues reflect not only the immediate failings of contemporary economic and social policies but also the deep-seated inequities rooted in historical processes of racialised dispossession, exploitation and exclusion, and the continuity of colonial and apartheid patterns despite formal political changes.

It would seem that democracy in post-1994 South Africa has been put into the service and used to legitimise what Neville Alexander (2023) famously referred to as racial capitalism, a system whose hierarchical and structurally racist functioning stands in sharp contrast to any sort of genuinely democratic horizon. South African psychology has, for the most part, been discernibly and unsettlingly quiet as South Africans continue to be calibrated and valued in accordance with the demands made by racial capitalism. The very substance of psychology in South Africa has often aligned with the ideologies of racial capitalism – with individualisation, depoliticisation, Eurocentrism, and a wilful turning away from the coloniality of power guiding much psychological practice in the country (Kessi & Boonzaier, 2018; Seedat & Suffla, 2017). Despite the obvious implications of the country's inequality burden for all of the rights guaranteed by the Constitution of South Africa, including psychological well-being (Lund, 2016), a role for psychological knowledge, mobilisation, and practice is rarely specified in intersectoral attempts to engage with South Africa's social malaise (see, e.g., National Planning Commission, 2012).

If psychology has yet to find its voice in disrupting structurally violent mechanisms in contemporary South Africa, what of its future scholars and practitioners? Notwithstanding, the discipline's popularity as a study area of choice at the country's tertiary institutions, progress towards a transformed, representative body of future psychologists has been positive but painstakingly slow (see, Padmanabhanunni et al., 2022). In 2014, on the register of the Health Professions Council of South Africa, Black psychologists were the least represented of South Africa's population groups – groupings which are, themselves, a legacy of apartheid-era social divisions. Nonetheless, all indications were that Black psychologists were to be increasingly represented in incoming Master's cohorts (Cooper, 2014). However, follow-up analyses have found otherwise, with only 14.8% of the clinical psychologists trained between 2007 and 2018 being Black South Africans (Pillay & Nyandeni, 2021). While this is an admittedly blunt measure of the continued slow pace of the transformation of the discipline's professional arm, it offers a stark reflection of South African psychology's inability to entirely break from the mechanisms of its colonial methods of exclusionary teaching practices (Seedat, 1998) – the residual evidence of which is directly tackled in this Special Issue (see this issue: Fadda & Rafaely, 2024; Laher, 2024; Ratele, 2024).

Moreover, psychology in South Africa has not aligned itself with the most urgent, emancipatory questions facing the country. Rather than robustly engaging with the structural legacies of colonialism and apartheid, their profound impact on the collective psyche and well-being of the nation, and how these sociogenic factors reinforce cycles of oppression (see also Fanon, 1967), psychology has largely remained inward-focused. As Ratele and his colleagues (2018) argue, although intervening in its skewed demographic profile 'might go some way towards decolonizing psychology in Africa . . . decolonization must extend beyond counting to something more slippery' (p. 340). It is precisely these slippery, yet critical, questions of social justice that South African psychology has largely failed to take on. The discipline, whether in its architectures of knowledge or places of practice has scarcely begun to face the questions of coloniality – questions that pertain to knowledge, power, and being (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018) – that are pivotal to the struggles facing most people in South Africa. The privatisation of psychology – enacted in the consulting rooms available to very few people in South Africa – underscores this disconnect. According to a recent study, there are approximately 0.97 public sector psychologists, senior psychologists and principal

psychologists per uninsured population, resulting in a staggering 92% mental health treatment gap in South Africa (Docrat et al., 2019).

In many ways, the lines of continuity evident in the thinking, practice and professional identity of psychology over the last three decades imply strong grounds for pessimism. If South Africa's democratic order seems chained to the demands of racial capitalism, so too is most of psychology in the country. South Africa's lines of historical continuity continue to drown out the hopeful celebrations that sounded the call to a new psychology at the birth of liberal democracy. However, there are certainly traces of those calls in key moments of the discipline's recent history. Common to these is the injunction to look outward to points of connection and solidarity rather than inward to fractures and difference, a rethinking of psychology as a practice, science, professional discipline, and discourse, one that exhibits a variety of fundamental definitions, units of analyses, as well as epistemological locations and limits within various knowledge and praxis networks (see this issue: Bazana, 2024; Malherbe et al., 2024). It is precisely when psychology is compelled to rethink its epistemic and intervention jurisdictions that its power is most evident and its liberatory potential clearest (see this issue: Malherbe & Canham, 2024). We are left today asking what it might mean to democratise psychology in a much more radical fashion; to render and shape psychology through the will, needs and visions of the majority; and to create psychological knowledges, theories, and practices with and for the psychosocial needs of this majority.

Legacies of hope

South African psychology has successfully embedded itself in a strategic set of global networks that have raised its public profile globally. We see this, for example, in how South African psychologists and collectives have become part of and have, themselves, initiated global networks that seek to advance liberatory conceptions of psychology, conceptions that break from a psychology that seeks to psychologise structural injustice and/or pathologise collective resistance (see, e.g., Readsura Decolonial Collective, 2022). A core group of psychologists in South Africa have, through PsySSA (2023), aligned with several solidarity struggles, such as those of the Palestinian people. While there have been some pockets of resistance to this organisational consensus, the impacts of such enactments of transnational solidarity are important and productive. These solidarity projects seek to trouble and transcend regressive disciplinary essentialisms and geo-disciplinary boundaries about the place of psychology in confronting structural oppression, but also to articulate forms of praxis and crossings that necessarily view humaning – 'life-in-the-making with others' (Erasmus, 2017, p. xxii) – and resistance to dehumanisation as pursuits integral to psychology's role in fostering collective well-being and liberation (see also Seedat et al., 2021). They also compel psychologists to fundamentally acknowledge the porosity of their private and professional selves as they are drawn into political modes of identification in navigating the terms, conditions and contingencies for solidarity and support. Putting the discipline on the frontlines of global struggles is thus an important mechanism for cleaving and keeping open the dialogic space in and through which psychology's unmistakable place in political worldmaking is visible, contestable, and discomforting.

Regionally, organised psychology has led efforts to consolidate the work of psychologists in Africa through the formation of the Pan-African Psychology Union (PAPU). Rather than predicate this leadership on any neocolonial proclivities in South Africa (see Bond, 2014), such spearheading initiatives have sought collaboration, mutuality and equality in courting the experiences, teaching and knowledge projects of the continent's psychology communities into a dialogue about how to address the continuities and paralysis that have preoccupied the discipline's often-localised gaze. This collective and continent-wide approach could be said to resonate with the spirit of Bandung,

embodying a philosophy, an imaginary, and an aspiration for self-determination and self-invention in opposition to the hegemony of the Global North (see Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019). It draws on a decolonial attitude (see Maldonado-Torres, 2017), has availed generative platforms for African- and south-centric dialogues on key questions about epistemic and ontological recuperation, and has begun to more intentionally theorise psychologies for Africa that account for both the histories of colonisation and contemporary socio-political realities in Africa. Doing so also opens up possibilities for rethinking the African subject of psychology beyond the constraints of colony and continent (Durrheim, 2024; Ratele, 2024).

As the hosts of the 30th International Psychology Congress, South Africa witnessed over 6000 delegates from 103 countries converging in Cape Town in July 2012 (Cooper, 2014). On a smaller but no less influential scale, in May 2016, South Africa served as the host to the 6th International Conference on Community Psychology, which saw 463 delegates from 46 countries converge under the theme *Global Dialogues on Critical Knowledges, Liberation and Community*.[3] Through these landmark events, the discipline deliberately attempted to forge partnerships and collaborations that encourage shared knowledge and practices challenging the supposed exceptionalism of the South African case (see Mamdani, 1996) to find resonances with countries that hold common colonial histories and social formations. As Alexander (2023) claimed, South Africa is an ordinary country, one whose history connects it with a global imperialist project as well as internationalist anti-colonial solidarities.

The COVID-19 pandemic provides a paradoxical glimmer of hope for recuperating the vision of a more radically democratised South African psychology. Between 2019 and 2022, when the COVID-19 pandemic reshaped human life most sharply across the world, South African psychologists, mobilising a wealth of expert knowledge and practice, appropriately demonstrated the dangers of excluding psychological health from the important considerations in the calculus of lockdown, thereby disrupting the dominion of the biomedical sciences in guiding policy and practice (Pillay & Barnes, 2020). In response to the lockdown's magnification of the structural vulnerabilities of Black South Africans to both increased rates of infection and violence (Bowman, 2020) and its acute impact on psychological service provision, the South African psychology community swiftly and adeptly adopted innovative interventions such as telehealth, online peer support groups, virtual training, digital psychoeducational resources, mental health emergency response plans, community outreach, and poverty alleviation measures, and engaged in policy dialogues to address the emerging challenges in mental health care. Psychology's galvanising response provides a clear window into what is possible when an agenda is shared, and the nexus between knowledge, practice and organisational capacity is synced by political will. If, as Arundhati Roy proclaimed, the COVID-19 pandemic served as a portal, one that we might 'walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it' (Roy, 2020, p. 214) – it was clear that many South African psychologists were willing to drag psychology through this portal. However, this will has proved largely short-lived as the discipline's systemic focus and intersectoral interventions have returned increasingly towards the individualising and privatised servicing of the racial capitalist order that had been somewhat disrupted during the pandemic. In this issue, Macleod et al. (2024) point precisely to the ways that much of the discipline continues to align with the dictates of racial capitalism in the wake of the pandemic.

Another promising area of inter- and intra-disciplinary cooperation that offers hope for the sorts of solidarity required to tackle the continuities of poverty and inequality in South Africa is noted in the efforts to mobilise psychology in mitigating the environmental catastrophe implied by the climate crisis. Many scholars who were traditionally trained in psychology have traversed a range of disciplinary approaches in their work, taking seriously the psychological underpinnings of sociological phenomena, such as masculinity (see this issue: Kabongo et al., 2024), HIV and

AIDS (see this issue: Patel, 2024), and disability (see this issue: Harvey & Swartz, 2024). At scale, this has meant that psychological praxis now incorporates a transdisciplinary architecture and approach. In contrast to a historical reluctance to intervene in the apparent epistemic territories of the 'hard sciences' (see this issue: Fadda & Rafaely, 2024), a core group of South African psychologists have made important strides in taking epistemological and activist ownership of this existential threat over the last five years. In 2022, the Division for Climate, Environment and Psychology was established as part of PsySSA. The inauguration of this division represents a watershed moment in the consolidation of the eco-psychology movement that has slowly found traction across the world, and now in South Africa. Such a moment disrupts the nebulous boundaries that separate humans from the systems that sustain life itself, and compels psychology to align itself with the broader interdisciplinary project of ensuring both planetary and social justice (Barnes et al., 2022). Psychology's concern with planetary questions has not, of course, been confined to climate. There have, for example, been several psychological interventions into ecology that take their bearings from decoloniality (see, e.g., PsySSA Decolonising Psychology Division, 2024). Planetary liberation has also always been part of the progressive tradition of community psychology in South Africa (see, e.g., Seedat & Suffla, 2017). Work of this kind, no matter how important, is marginal. South African psychology largely remains apart from a planetary ethics that cherishes socio-ecological relations as they exist in the broader web of life (see Moyo & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2022). Such an ethical framework must be taken up by psychologists if, indeed, psychology is to be imbued with the kind of socio-ecological urgency demanded by the present historical moment.

Threaded through the logic of racialised capitalism, South Africa continues to suffer under the scourges of inequality, poverty, violence, inaccessible universal health care, and intractably high levels of unemployment. In response, South African psychology's quest for relevance has been preoccupied by its traditional thinking of human life as distinct from the broader geo-political, biological, and environmental systems that birth, shape, and sustain or terminate it. However, the promises of global solidarity and Pan-Africanism, and the discipline's collective, coordinated and committed responses to the existential threats of COVID-19, coloniality, and climate emergency have offered some clues as to what happens when South African psychology is tilted back towards some of the coordinates that grounded its hope for a better future some 30 years ago. Under this calibration, South African psychology embraced an essentially, nested, connected, and human subject as its unit of analysis and intervention. Such a psychology looks outwards to points of global connection and solidarity rather than exceptionalism or parochialism and refuses to 'know its place' in the order of things. As the world moves between dissolving the human subject into its prosaic place as part of the natural world or threatens to reconstitute it in a virtual correlate, South African psychology will have to retreat in no small measure away from an inward, territorial and constrained mode of thought and practice towards reigniting the expansive, ambitious, rebuilding of which it had imagined itself so capable in its hopeful years. It is with this in mind that we turn to such tensions and tilting in the articles featured in this Special Issue.

Introducing the special issue

The first cluster of articles in the issue draws on key historical and epistemological moments to provide a thematic overview of South African psychology's historical trajectory. Marking PsySSA's 30th anniversary, the first article, *Looking Backwards, Looking Forwards: Collective and Critical Conversations on Psychology in South Africa*, represents an edited transcript of a conversation between several PsySSA past presidents, namely: Cooper, Foxcroft, Mashego, Mulaudzi, Nel, Pillay, Ratele, Sodi, Suffla, Stevens, and Watts – with Malherbe and Bowman serving as

facilitators of the conversation. The conversation included discussions on the lack of consensus on an agenda for South African psychology, the global and epistemic jurisdiction of psychology, and the ways in which South African psychology can and should respond to political crises. Discussants concluded that psychology in South Africa must be fundamentally transformed if it is to be responsive 'to the most pressing epistemological and socio-political concerns of the moment; attuning itself to the potential critical turns that may emerge beyond decoloniality'.

In his article, *The Psychology of Social Change. What Went Wrong – 30 Years Post-Apartheid – and How to Fix it!*, Durrheim takes up the challenge laid out by PsySSA's presidents as he reflects on over 30 years of research in the social psychology of social change in South Africa, focusing on racial encounters in post-1994 desegregated spaces. His work has drawn on a range of methodological frameworks, collaborative projects with both students and colleagues, as well as ethnographic, discursive, and survey methods to describe the changing nature of intergroup interactions in South Africa. His article examines both the successes and limitations of desegregation efforts in the country, highlighting the critique of intergroup contact theory in the context of social psychology. The article concludes by way of connecting to our overarching analysis of South African psychology's relationship to the rest of the African and global psychology community, exploring anticolonial critiques of contact as a solution and draws on the concept of Afropolitanism as a potential framework for addressing these challenges going forward.

In further interrogating the potentialities of anti-colonial responses to the recalcitrance of racialisation in, through and by psychology, Ratele's article, titled *Freedom from American Psychology*, deploys the notion of unfreedom to interrogate the epistemic (self)colonisation that persists within South African psychology, thereby contributing to the ongoing project of decolonising the discipline. Calling for a pivotal shift towards situated epistemologies and practices, Ratele critiques how American-centric, white-supremacist knowledge frameworks continue to dominate the discipline, reinforcing logics of ontological hierarchy, racial superiority, and intellectual subordination. He argues that this unfreedom not only legitimises harmful ideologies and materialities, but also constrains the potential for epistemic self-determination and the development of Africa(n)-centring psychologies. Drawing on illustrations of refusal and apology, Ratele underscores the criticality of epistemic accountability, contending that in its absence we remain complicit in and captive to oppressive psychologies. As counter, Ratele considers what teaching otherwise could look like to advance epistemic decolonisation and epistemic freedom.

As an example of the affordances offered by such local groundings, in their article, *Reading a Liberation Psychology Archive in South Africa*, Malherbe and Canham consider South Africa's liberation psychology tradition by examining the archives of Mohamed Seedat, a pioneer in this tradition. Both authors demonstrate that excavating liberation psychology requires reading beyond the conventional knowledge sources through which mainstream psychology is consolidated. As such, in addition to Seedat's published writings, the authors rely on artefacts, conversation snippets, and traces of institutional bureaucracy to excavate Seedat's liberation psychology archive. Malherbe and Canham surmise that Seedat's archive hems closer to the demands of liberation than psychology. Resisting any hagiographic impulse, the authors conclude with some critical comments on this archive, insisting that archival readings that pass through different interpretive registers – affective, political, personal, and institutional – can act to 'excavate historically embedded understandings of what psycho-political liberation has demanded across space and time'.

As an empirical rejoinder to the overall critiques carved out by the previous article, in *Decolonisation and South African Psychology Research 30 Years after Democracy*, Macleod, du Plessis, and Mogonong offer a situational analysis of the articles published over the last 5 years in the SAJP, as well as the abstracts published in *PsycINFO*, which have used 'South Africa' as a

keyword. They compare these results with an earlier review that made use of the same methodology, assessing the challenges and successes of South African psychology's knowledge-making project. They consider what a relevant psychology would mean in the face of present-day systems of coloniality, noting that there is much work to be done in pressing South African psychology into the service of epistemological justice. They call for undoing 'the androcentrism in knowledge generation, challenging the commercialisation and commodification of knowledge, democratising knowledge production, and decentering hierarchies of thought and knowledge'.

Advancing the evidence for the way in which the colonising hauntings of the past continue to infiltrate South African psychology in the present, Fadda and Rafaely's article, *Colonial Methodologies: A Discourse Analysis of Medical Students' Talk About Psychology*, analyses the epistemological tensions between the natural and social sciences, considering the discourses associated with these two sciences in relation to coloniality. The authors use discursive psychology to examine the discourses that medical students draw on when talking about psychology. Their analysis indicates that greater value is assigned to psychology when the discipline aligns with colonising methodologies which, through Eurocentric knowledges, institute colonial practices of othering. It is, however, because psychology pivots on tensions between the social and natural sciences that there is space for resistance within psychology. The authors conclude that such resistance is ongoing work. Assuming a reflexive register, they urge researchers to address the 'power imbalances in how psychology is conceptualised and practised in South Africa'.

The second cluster of articles in the Special Issue provides important, specific instantiations of the way that South African psychology has reified its epistemological trajectories through its practices, thereby producing subjects as the instruments and effects of its power. In *Advancing an Agenda for Psychological Assessment in South Africa*, Laher interrogates the universalist assumptions and Eurocentric biases of psychological assessment, as well as how psychological assessment served as a legitimising apparatus for the apartheid regime. Laher traces changes in psychological assessment in South Africa since the 1990s, considers what assessment means since the COVID-19 pandemic, and reflects on the challenges and opportunities facing assessment today, giving particular focus to accessibility, global knowledge transfers, societal needs, and indigenisation. Laher concludes by insisting that meaningful psychological assessment must 'transcend the discipline to become more socially relevant and responsive'.

Another key critique of the way that psychology has policed its disciplinary boundaries is provided by Harvey and Swartz in their article *Something About Us with Us: A Reflection of Disability Studies within Psychology in South Africa.* Locating themselves as disabled psychologists, and therefore occupying the subject positions on which they authorially speak, the authors interrogate the silences that have come to characterise South Africa's fraught relationship with disability and disability studies. Drawing on a biopolitical framework, they argue that psychology's vision of both itself as a discipline and practice struggles to imagine a world that is not able-bodied, and thus others and silences threats to this normalising vision. Their approach provides a generative window through which to better understand the intersectional nature of oppression, including the historical silencing of contributions to knowledge by psychologists marginalised along different axes of structural oppression.

Psychology's blindness and myopia are further tackled by Rabia Patel in her article, *Our Grief Matters – Loss, Grief and Mourning in Black Vertically-Infected HIV-positive Adolescents*. Patel tackles the long-standing criticism that psychoanalytically inflected approaches are race-blind, and therefore of little value to understanding the fractures that define South Africa's social formation. Drawing on exactly such a psychoanalytic framework, she highlights the importance of understanding raced subjectivity in accounting for the complex and compounding trauma suffered by

three vertically HIV-infected Black adolescents. She provides a compelling case for how canonical forms of psychological scholarship can and should be leveraged in understanding how particular bodies are constituted as sites of sociopolitical violence and oppression as well as relays for psychic trauma.

South African psychology's relationship to the production of the gendered body is a key focus on the next article, *Celebrating 30 Years of Masculinities Scholarship in the South African Journal of Psychology (SAJP)*, by Kabongo, Langa and Kane. The article explores the discursive shape of psychological research on masculinity by applying a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis to a purposively selected corpus of articles published in the SAJP between 1994 and 2024. Over the course of the 30 years under review, masculinities were the focus of 66 articles. Though grounded in the three dominant discourses of gender, sexuality, and violence; health and wellness; and fatherhood, they find a temporal shift in constructions of men that track a move away from essentialising versions of manhood and towards more positive and egalitarian perspectives that are non-hegemonic and non-violent.

In the final article, *Exploring Worker Subjectivity: Shaping Industrial and Organizational Psychology in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, Bazana examines the development of Industrial and Organisational Psychology within the multifaceted socio-political terrain of post-1994 South Africa. In returning to some of the political tensions that characterised the birth of a democratic South African psychology discussed above and re-orienting classical studies that cleave individualised approaches to work from the broader political arena in which they are constituted, the analysis adopts a critical perspective, integrating insights from worker subjectivity derived from critical psychology and management studies. The resultant analysis offers a context-rich perspective that reframes the worker as a product of South Africa's particular historical, political, and cultural complexities.

Together, these articles engage critically the sorts of questions with which we began this article. Their areas of focus are necessarily partial and many of the dire systemic challenges facing South Africa (e.g., interlocking violences, inequality, unemployment, environmental degradation), although addressed, are not always centred. Again, the Special Issue does not, because it cannot, claim to offer a comprehensive overview of psychology in South Africa today. It contains omissions not only with respect to challenges facing psychology, but also in relation to voices, topics, approaches, and debates in, adjacent, and counter to psychology, a discipline, discourse, science, and practice that has never been at one with itself or definitive in its purpose (see this issue: Malherbe et al., 2024). Nonetheless, each contribution in the Special Issue remains broadly concerned with where psychology in South Africa is going, and indeed, how the country's past determines this trajectory. These are questions which urge psychology to address issues and struggles it has tended to turn away from. While each article traces its own continuities of despair, if there is a sense of hope in their narrative arcs, it is a trepidatious, cautious, and careful glimmering of hope. South Africa's material and psychological conditions have placed hope under tremendous strain. However, even when hope in South Africa has given way to hopelessness, South Africans themselves continue to struggle. Hopelessness is yet to become helplessness (ka Canham, 2023).

Fault lines of the future: towards an ordinary psychology

In the face of the recalcitrance of racial capitalism, colonial knowledge architectures and perpetual passing over of the opportunities for systemic social change, how can South African psychology recuperate hope – the affective register that appeared to infiltrate so much of the country and psychology in 1994?

While it is certainly the case that South Africa's hegemonic ordering suffocates hope, we would do well to remember that this ordering is never totalising. Across this Special Issue, there are whisperings and traces that offer pathways to access a liberated South Africa whose spectre has always animated the nation's freedom dreams. These residues point psychology to very particular coordinates for building a future that looks different from the continuities that bind its present to its past. Instead of looking inwards towards its own disciplinary hubris, these articles call on psychology to look outwards, beyond its boundaries. Rather than isolating the human as a discrete, separable, and special unit of analysis and intervention, psychology is urged to return humanity to the birthplace of its planetary entanglements (see Moyo & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2022). In contrast to calls for solidarity under states of exception, the discipline would do well to bed down its potential in the ordinariness of everyday South African life. As a small number of psychologists have repeatedly emphasised (see, e.g., Sonn et al., 2017), psychology must be recalibrated to better align with the psychosocial demands of social and political movements in South Africa. These movements are attuned to the fact that although South Africa is extraordinary in some respects (e.g., the enormous levels of land dispossession), South Africa is also, as Alexander (2023) teaches us, an ordinary country, one subjected to the brutalities of a globalised imperial order. They are movements that have refused 'the implications of TINA [There Is No Alternative], and learned a rejoinder: "There Must Be an Alternative" – THEMBA, the Zulu word for 'hope'' (Bond, 2014, p. 122). Indeed, there is always hope to be excavated in collective struggle (Freire, 1997), even when those engaged in struggle do so hopelessly. As Roy (2009) insists: 'hope has little to do with reason' (p. 91). It is perhaps worth taking seriously what a psychology detached from historically governing modes of reason might look like.

To demand a hopeful psychology – a psychology of hope – is perhaps too demanding. But if we are to build an ordinary psychology – one that learns and takes its epistemological and political bearings from those social actors who understand South Africa as an ordinary country – we might begin to shed some of the individualism and hubris that align psychology with damaging discourses of exceptionalism (see Mamdani, 1996), discourses that seek to privatise distress (see Fisher, 2009), and discourses that privilege the human above all other life (see ka Canham, 2023). An ordinary psychology not only recognises the structural distribution of distress, but also the necessity of addressing distress on a structural level, within and across the planet's life systems. In this, we might begin to make liberation ordinary too.

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Notes

1. Seven others were also sentenced on this charge: Ahmed Kathrada, Walter Sisulu, Elias Motsoaledi, Andrew Mlangeni, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba, and Denis Goldberg.
2. Democracy is, of course, incredibly charged. Although capitalism and coloniality are global systems that do not need democracy, both have sought legitimacy by operating under the sign of democracy. There are, however, more radical models of democracy, where democracy is understood as an ongoing, reflective process that is managed and directed by collectives. Many contemporary South African struggles aim to push democracy towards more emancipatory and egalitarian horizons (Malherbe, 2023).
3. See https://internationalcommunitypsychology.com/conference-photo-gallery/durban-2016/.

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