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PsySSA
Psychological Society of South Africa

Article

Looking backwards, looking forwards: collective and critical conversations on psychology in South Africa

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Abstract

To mark the 30th anniversary of the Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA), 11 of PsySSA's past presidents, along with two facilitators, gathered in early 2024 for a roundtable discussion on psychology in South Africa. This article represents an edited transcript of that conversation. The guiding motif of the discussion – *looking backwards*, *looking forwards* – led discussants through the historical temporalities, institutional, professional and disciplinary debates, as well as the political concerns that face and have forged South African psychology. The discussants were specifically concerned with the challenges of unifying organised psychology; the generative forces, conflicts and antagonisms within psychology; psychology's pedagogical and intellectual developments; and what it means to politicise psychology in and beyond South Africa. In looking ahead, the discussion concluded with an internationalist reflection on how psychology in South Africa contributes to global knowledges and praxes. The conversation was characterised by epistemic, sectoral and political tensions, as well as ambivalences and shifting centres of gravity, all of which reflect

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the accomplishments made within South African psychology, as well as psychology's status as a strongly contested and patently unfinished organisational, disciplinary, professional, service and knowledge project.

Keywords
Contradiction, global psychology, organised psychology, political psychology, psychological society of South Africa, PsySSA, unification

Introduction

The year 2024 marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA). In honour of this occasion, 11 of PsySSA's past presidents, along with two facilitators, convened on 20 February 2024 for a roundtable discussion. This article captures the spirit of that discussion, with each discussant (and the two facilitators) serving as a co-author on this article. The purpose of the discussion was to offer an informed but knowingly partial, incomplete and critical assessment of psychology in South Africa (SA) today, with a view to reflecting on some of psychology's accomplishments and challenges, as well as its possible futures. With the formalisation of psychology in SA being so intimately tied to forces of oppression and emancipation (see Cooper & Nicholas, 2012; Seedat & Lazarus, 2011; Suffla et al., 2001), the discussants understandably grounded their talk in the various social, political and historical developments in SA that have shaped and continue to shape SA psychology. The discussion was especially attuned to the various tensions that mark psychology in SA, many of which can be attributed to psychology's status as both an academic and a professional discipline. This dual character of psychology perhaps opens it up to greater internal contestation than fields that are solely academic or exclusively professional. Indeed, psychology in SA has to contend with competing demands that have sometimes propelled it into multiple directions.

The guiding motif of the discussion – its structuring principle and thus rhetorical directive – was *looking backwards, looking forwards*. Rooted in this backwards-forwards dialectic, the discussion was not constrained by historical specificities, many of which have been well documented by South African psychologists (see, for example, Van Ommen & Painter, 2008). As such, although several of the discussants made reference to the so-called relevance debate which has loomed over psychology in SA since the 1970s (Long, 2013; Macleod, 2004), discussants also interrogated the institutional make-up of contemporary psychology, psychology's inherent tensions, the intellectual and pedagogical developments within psychology, and what it means to put psychology to work for a progressive set of political commitments, both within and beyond SA. The discussion was, in short, wide-ranging, and although not without direction, its trajectory was also not predetermined nor overly directed.

Assessing psychology in SA through a backwards-forwards dialectic is not wholly novel (see, for example, Cooper, 2019; Kagee, 2014; Painter & Terre Blanche, 2004; Suffla & Seedat, 2004). Such assessments have, however, tended to adhere to more conventional scholarly forms. This article, by contrast, makes methodological use of conversation as a knowledge-making device (see Ratele et al., 2021). Through conversation, the often-specious demarcations between theory, practice, discipline and experience – between history and anecdote – begin to dissolve. In this mode, conversation can allow for a generative, at times contradictory, range of knowledges and assessments. The conversational form can partially lift many of the constraints demanded by narrative linearity (Bourdieu, 2000), giving rise to a more openly discursive mode of exploratory freedom.

Thus, it is precisely because it is deployable for collaborative knowledge-creation, but equally for its role in personal and organisational identity-constructions, contesting and stabilising the past, as well as imagining futures (Ratele & Malherbe, 2022), that conversation was eminently suitable for the purposes of this project.

With discussants hailing from different parts of the country, it made logistical sense that the conversation takes place online. The conversation was recorded and, as it appears in this article, has been condensed and edited for readability. Formal references to specific academic literature and history flagged by some of the discussants have been included as citations, with minor historical inaccuracies amended. An attempt has also been made to ground the discussants' meaning-making and perspectives (both of which are constitutive of the conversational form) within academic literature. Importantly, not everything discussed in the nearly 2-hr conversation is reflected in this article. Space constraints and the inherent selectivity required in all editorial endeavours played a significant role in shaping the content that the authors regarded as important in capturing the spirit of the conversation. Considering the nature and scope of these omissions, it is evident that several longer and more varied individual and collective contributions on the histories, current state and futures of SA psychology are warranted (Manganyi, 2016).

In this article, a somewhat different approach was taken to present a conversation in writing, one that is advantageous in some respects and limited in others. Conversational excerpts were not attributed to particular speakers. Instead, the transcribed discussion has been edited and written up in the form of an academic journal article. In this, each discussant assumes responsibility for the entire discussion as a co-author on this article. Where the passive voice is employed in this introduction, a collective active voice is taken up in the subsequent sections.

Disagreements between discussants are not presented in this article at the particular moments at which they emerged in the discussion. Rather, the different – sometimes conflicting – positions taken up by discussants are woven into the relevant sections of the article. This approach aims to maintain narrative coherence while offering the requisite space for discussants' positions. In so doing, the article does not privilege a pointed analysis of how different voices converged and diverged. It also does not concern itself with whether discussants resolved discursive tension. As such, it is conceded that the contribution may run the risk of reading as a singular, synthesised voice, flattened by consensus. The hope is, however, that this piece is read as an engaging, situated assessment of psychology in SA, one that is driven by the sort of discursive freedom facilitated by conversation and that is mimetic of psychology's inherent (oftentimes incompatible) pluralities.

This article does not make the implicit, flawed claim that those who have occupied leadership positions within SA psychology are the most qualified to assess the field. Indeed, some of the most incisive evaluations of psychology in SA have come from students, emerging psychologists and interns (James et al., 2024; Mokobedi et al., 2024; Nkadimeng et al., 2016). Nonetheless, PsySSA's past presidents can be regarded as a specialised type of key informant. The discussion contained in this article should thus be understood as representing a particular standpoint that each discussant has occupied in different ways, shaped by their experiences and roles. Despite the conversation being focused on psychology as its unit of analysis, the participants frequently evoked their organisational standpoints as the lens through which their analysis took form. This provides an important authorial benefit but can also inadvertently limit the scope of the discussion. Therefore, this conversation is not intended to be the final word on, or a definitive encapsulation of, SA psychology. It is, rather, one dialogue among many that, it is hoped, will catalyse further conversations and critical reflections within the field at a historically poignant moment.

A final point should be made with respect to authorship. It was always intended that this conversation would be considered for inclusion in a Special Issue of the *South African Journal of Psychology* commemorating PsySSA's 30th anniversary. The Special Issue is co-edited by Brett

Bowman, Shahnaaz Suffla and Nick Malherbe. However, because Suffla served as a past president of PsySSA, and thus participated in the roundtable discussion, Malherbe and Bowman facilitated the discussion to ensure that Suffla would not have to shift repeatedly between discussant and facilitator. In different ways, then, the three co-editors contributed to the discussion and especially the selective framing of it as reported herein. They thus serve as co-authors on this article.

In what follows, the discussants begin by engaging with the issues of unification, and what it meant to bring together the disparate formations and commitments of psychologists in SA. Following this, and in many ways pushing back against the unification imperative, the conversation focused on contradiction, and what it actually meant and might mean to forge psychologies in SA through disciplinary and professional tensions. Next, discussants focused on politicising psychology, looking specifically at the challenges and tensions of addressing psychology's individualising tendencies as well as what it means to put psychology to work for a set of political commitments in the interests of the public good. Finally, in looking ahead, discussants reflected on what psychology in SA might offer to global psychology, the ambivalence that many feel towards their disciplinary and/or professional home, the desire for inter- and trans-disciplinarity, as well as the need for psychologists in SA to take seriously the ways by which the social and the historical are embedded within the psyche.

Unification: an unattainable ideal?

Since 1994, one of the biggest challenges and simultaneous disappointments for organised psychology has been the quest for unity, that is, to bring together disparate psychologists working as scientists, researchers, scholars, teachers, as well as clinical and community-engaged practitioners (Cooper & Nicholas, 2012). Ideologically, this emphasis on coherence and unity aligned with national imperatives in SA that called for social coherence and non-racialism in the face of the violent structural divisiveness that defined the country's social order for over four centuries. Both nationally and within psychology, the project of coherence has faced many challenges (Sigogo et al., 2004), and remains an unfinished political, social, economic and epistemic endeavour.

Unifying psychologists who occupy different sub-disciplines of psychology, but also, perhaps more significantly, across race, gender and ideological inclination, has not been seamless. In many ways, as several critical psychologists have demonstrated, organised psychology in SA has mirrored the country's hegemonic socio-political and ideological arrangements (Suffla et al., 2001). Delineating the intricate reasons behind the persistent challenge of unifying psychology in SA is beyond the scope of this discussion. Nonetheless, we can discern some of the fragmentary currents within psychology. There is, for instance, a tendency to hold onto psychological frameworks rooted in Western hegemonic knowledges, while politicised iterations of psychology (i.e., using psychology in ways that advance progressive political agendas) remain marginalised (Long, 2013). This is compounded by ongoing racialised and gendered skewing in the composition of psychological practitioners within training programmes and the profession overall (Carolissen et al., 2017; A. L. Pillay et al., 2013). Institutionally, shrinking university budgets, a lack of resources and the exclusive use of English as the medium of instruction have all played a part in scuppering attempts to unify psychology through an inclusive, progressive curriculum and training programme (Seabi et al., 2014).

However, it would be inaccurate to claim that mainstream psychology has drifted towards an institutionalised, for-profit, Eurocentric model. Rather, SA psychology was instituted through this model. From the early-20th century, psychology in SA was consolidated by a white, largely male, cohort committed to the colonial and, later, the apartheid project (Cooper & Nicholas, 2012). Although a black-led, politicised psychology was established in response to this hegemonic iteration

of psychology (Seedat & Lazarus, 2011), the legacy of this dominant, foundational psychology remains alive in an individualising, fragmenting and Westernised orientation. This orientation plays a key part in inhibiting psychological practitioners from unifying their discipline and practice through the social, which is to say, from bringing different psychological practices into social and community enterprises in the ways that, for example, some medical practitioners have (van Pinxteren et al., 2022), oftentimes through the South African Medical Association (e.g., van Rensburg, 2017). However, psychologists in SA have not altogether resisted mobilising around the social. This was apparent when PsySSA leveraged buy-in from psychologists across the country to amend the Employment Equity Act[1] which had initially excluded all psychometric testing (A. L. Pillay & Kramers, 2003). Yet, attempts to mobilise psychology around the social have been the exception rather than the rule in SA, and this appears to reflect, at least in part, the enduring influence of Western versions of psychology within the country, as well as the complex and competing tensions between a market-oriented psychology, guild pursuits, and individual race and class interests. The resultant strains are perhaps underpinned by the pivotal question related to what the function of SA psychology should be. Should psychology be put into the predominant service of the public good or in the predominant service of the individual? The answer to this question has consequences for the ideological, epistemic, economic, and political valence of SA psychology and its attendant contestations.

The persistent disunity and fragmentation within psychology and among psychologists in SA reflects psychology's institutional location which, again, stymies psychology from interacting fully with and transforming itself through social commitments. For most psychologists in SA, the State does not offer sufficient avenues of employment. This limited access to the public sector encourages the production of mental health practitioners for the privileged, private market, despite the fact that psychological services are lacking for the vast majority of the population (Canham et al., 2022; A. L. Pillay et al., 2013; Sorsdahl et al., 2023). Many psychologists are therefore compelled to consider private practice, where medical aid schemes support livelihoods, and this may well be at odds with social responsibility priorities. Indeed, most of the energy and resources within contemporary psychology are being mobilised to consolidate the private sector, further fragmenting the discipline and profession into individual private practitioner silos (Bantjes et al., 2016). Although SA's policy plans, like the *National Mental Health Policy Framework*,[2] are acknowledged as among the most progressive globally and have been widely sanctioned by psychologists, there remains a lack of political will, understanding and communication to develop the intersectoral approach and amass the resources required to meaningfully implement this kind of policy (de Wee & Asmah-Andoh, 2022). Considerable disagreement also prevails regarding the planned National Health Insurance (NHI), the place of psychology therein, as well as the broader concerns regarding sustainability, access, accreditation standards, accountability, funding, corruption, lack of trust in the State and inadequate health infrastructure (Kleintjes et al., 2021). Once again, this mirrors the society in which we teach and practice psychology today.

Resistance to dominant, Eurocentric psychology in SA has forged a commitment, among many of today's psychologists, to realising another kind of psychology, one that does not seek out unity in Eurocentrism. Instead, unity is sought in how psychology can be transformed and made to embrace the fullness of humanity. Despite this growing collective investment, PsySSA, for its part, continues to be faced with the challenge of unifying the interests of psychological scholars, practitioners, and other organisational bodies, including younger people working in the profession. Certainly, PsySSA has shown itself as largely adept in efforts at supporting psychological services within rural communities in SA (De Kock & Pillay, 2017), as well as establishing collaborations between socially oriented psychological sub-disciplines, registration categories, and divisions (Bhamjee, 2023). Work of this kind has, however, been achieved despite fierce contestation and

resistance. Certainly, PsySSA's strategic orientation and vision has generally not mirrored the prevailing ethos among the bulk of psychologists who may be private practitioners and whose prevailing focus has oftentimes been on the relationship between their epistemic orientation, practice and their economic livelihoods. The tensions that mark PsySSA – between and among its members and its leadership – thus resemble the broader tensions that mark the field of psychology.

Attempts at unifying psychology must therefore be taken up in a conscious manner, forged through political will, paying close attention to the epistemic, emotional/affective, occupational and economic motivations of becoming a psychologist. If psychology is to become a socially relevant public good that is made available to all who need it and that carries influence in policy-making spaces, leaders of PsySSA must gain the buy-in and support from the wider community of psychologists, who will be called upon to cede a certain privileged status and specialised expertise to advance the social good. Pretending that the professional and economic motives of psychologists and would-be psychologists do not exist will not be helpful in such an endeavour.

Unification through plurality will not organically emerge out of our current socio-economic milieu, which in many respects is characterised by social inequality and individualised forms of competition and economic mobility. At some level then, there is a need to accept that psychology's complete unification may be an unattainable ideal. However, if we can prioritise certain fundamental non-negotiables, such as fair and ethical services and research, equitable access to mental health services across generations, and a constant reflection on the roles of psychology in social well-being, we would have come a long way from psychology's colonial history of inequity and exclusion.

PsySSA is not South African psychology: contradiction and polyvocal interests

As we have discussed so far, disunity within psychology is reflective of our current social order which foregrounds the individual, the commodification of care and market forces (Suffla et al., 2001). However, what of the generative facets of disunity? PsySSA itself was not forged out of a tidy synthesis or neat consensus. It was built through intensive debate, resistance, lobbying and agonism (Cooper & Nicholas, 2012). Today, there appears to sit within SA psychology a polyvocality that has pulled psychology into important, socially relevant projects, many of which have received considerable resistance from those invested in dominant psychologies (Ratele, 2019). It is perhaps possible to keep psychology dynamic and in touch with the current contextual complexities through polyvocal interests rather than attempting to bring each voice into a singular, unified framework. Although polyvocality may invite anxiety and contestation, it can also ensure that psychology remains open and receptive to disruptive and transformative forces. The turbulent times in SA can thus be reflected within a generative 'practice category' and theoretic turbulence of sorts, with contestation forming part of an effort to build a more encompassing and expansive psychological practice in the country.

PsySSA, in many respects, has matured in its approach to unification. PsySSA occupies one part of psychology's contested terrain, but it cannot supplant, subsume or claim psychology entirely. It may be that some psychologists cannot identify with the preamble to PsySSA's Constitution that acknowledges 'psychology's historical complicity in supporting and perpetuating colonialism and the apartheid system' (PsySSA, 1994, p. 1). It may also be the case that not everyone sees their interests reflected in the make-up of psychology, nor in the organisational make-up of PsySSA. For example, when the Forum of African Psychology (FAP) formally broke away from PsySSA, several psychologists struggled to understand why anyone would attempt to transform psychology from outside of PsySSA (Ratele, 2019). However, FAP's exit from PsySSA was never intended as

an alienating or splintering strategy,[3] but rather a move to give expression to voices that seek to understand and explain what Nwoye (2014) refers to as the 'complexities of human mental life, culture and experience in the pre- and post-colonial African world' (p. 57). It was, and still is, a move towards critiquing psychology and holding psychology to account from outside of PsySSA; developing psychology through organisational tension. PsySSA, for its part, was receptive to this project, continuing to invite members of FAP to participate in its various fora, conferences and public engagements.

We also saw PsySSA developing through tension when it issued a position statement in support of the people of Palestine in 2020.[4] This statement drew criticism from interest groups, both within and outside of psychology, as well as from a small number of PsySSA members. This dissent resurfaced in January 2024 after PsySSA's statement on the war in Gaza was released. There have been many other instances where people expressed discomfort over positions that PsySSA has held publicly. Certainly, political statements of this kind are unlikely to be met with homogeneous support from within psychological organisations. However, we cannot repress such contestation. Instead, we can use it as a springboard for robust engagement and as a means for reflecting on the kinds of psychology and psychological institutions that we want to build in SA. Importantly, as PsySSA was the product of a merger between the Psychological Association of South Africa and Psychologists Against Apartheid on 28 January 1994, prior to the advent of democracy in SA (Cooper & Nicholas, 2012), it is inevitable that our variously constructed pasts will present themselves as continuities in the current challenges that confront PsySSA and psychologists.

People may wish well to avoid contestation, believing that they risk vilification if they engage in debate of any sort. However, even when contestation is not overt, it is present, perhaps persisting latently, percolating beneath the surface. When we ignore, repress or turn away from psychology's internal tensions, these tensions may be left unresolved and can escalate into destructive forces, as has been observed in some of the legal battles that PsySSA has faced over the years (Bhamjee, 2023). Moreover, when tensions go unacknowledged, they can manifest as low-intensity conflicts which have the potential to cause the sorts of repeated, destructive splintering that can occur when people feel unheard by the organisational body to which they belong.

Not all tensions should be accommodated within psychology though. The mere existence of tension does not mark generative developments within an organisation or discipline. For example, efforts can and must be made to confront the racism and misogyny which has plagued psychology throughout its disciplinary and professional history in SA (Duncan et al., 2001; Potgieter & de la Rey, 1997). Similarly, many of the responses to PsySSA's positions on Palestinian solidarity have, over the years, been hostile, antipathetic and ultimately regressive with respect to anti-oppressive practices and the opposition to the normalisation of violence. As such, it is possible to feel an ambivalence towards contradictions and internal tension. On one hand, contradictions open up space for robust intellectual engagement, public debate and the avoidance of disciplinary decadence (i.e., psychologists prioritising their own theories, methodologies and disciplinary orthodoxies over social problems as they exist in reality; Malherbe & Dlamini, 2020). Yet, on the other hand, remaining open to internal tension risks collapsing into an inward gaze that stagnates psychology, preventing those in psychology from turning towards political and social imperatives at critical moments. It is vital that psychology in SA, and other regions globally, must not fall short of its ethical obligations, as evidenced in the United States, where psychology has been directly complicit in (or remained silent on) serious human rights violations (Olson et al., 2008), including torture (Eidelson, 2023).

For better or for worse, it is only through contestation that we can articulate the various political forces acting within and upon psychology. PsySSA's own contradictions are, in many ways, reflective of SA's political establishment. For all the discomfort that they may create, contradictions

should not be ignored. But, while contradictions can be politically generative and a cause for reflection and change, they should also not, in every instance, be understood as inherently healthy for an institution or for honouring humanising political commitments.

How we think about and approach the task of politicising psychology

If psychology has, through the decades, mirrored the oppressive and/or regressive elements of South African society (Suffla et al., 2001), it has also reflected and championed the liberatory legacy of South African political activism. Psychology has always had a politicising, progressive underbelly, even if this is elided, denied, ignored or resisted by many psychologists (Seedat & Suffla, 2017). The 1980s and the 1990s ushered in a remarkable epistemic shift in certain strands of SA psychology. Psychology was pushed to acknowledge not only its embeddedness within a world defined by oppressive political power, but also how it had been used to support to oppressive politics (Seedat et al., 1988). During this time, an increasing number of anti-apartheid psychologists began assuming an explicitly socially just, progressive political orientation in their work. This was most apparent in community and critical psychology (Painter & Terre Blanche, 2004; Seedat & Lazarus, 2011).

Today, we are seeing the legacy of this epistemic shift in the politicised paths being chartered within decolonial psychology, feminist psychology, as well as indigenous and African psychologies (see Baloyi & Ramose, 2016; Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2019; Kessi, 2019; Kessi et al., 2022; Kiguwa, 2023; Matoane, 2012; Mkhize, 2021; Oppong, 2022; Ratele, 2019; Segalo & Cakata, 2017; Sodi et al., 2021; Stevens & Sonn, 2021; Suffla et al., 2023). The socially conscious politicising currents within SA psychology – although on the margins of psychology – have created nurturing epistemic communities throughout the country. These communities have been inspiring for many. They have also been a source of fortitude. Looking at this longer liberatory tradition within psychology, SA has contributed in important ways to how psychological practitioners across the globe think about and approach the task of politicising psychology.

At the national level, psychology in SA has, since 1994, made significant strides in aligning with the country's constitutional project of non-racialism and gender equity. At the theoretical level, this has meant an emphasis on a psychology for all, although this principle has not consistently translated into practice. Nonetheless, internationally, SA psychology's leadership has increasingly been recognised as critical and authoritative in areas such as human rights, social justice, racism, culture and decolonisation. We have also seen several progressive guidelines, training programmes, best practice guides, policy positions and statements that have been put into effect across various scales, from the macro- to the micro level. For example, SA psychology – which once represented a cis-heteronormative apparatus of pathologisation – has contributed significantly to affirmative positions and practices around lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer (LGBTIQ+) identities (Victor & Nel, 2017). PsySSA, in particular, has been central in committing psychologists to queer rights and struggles in SA (Judge & Nel, 2018). This politicised practice of psychology in SA has received international recognition (S. R. Pillay et al., 2019). During the COVID-19 pandemic, PsySSA was not only at the forefront of developing support protocols for frontline workers and those tasked with attenuating the effects of the pandemic (e.g., educationists), but also challenging inequitable forms of global vaccine nationalism, and calling for proportional psychosocial support for marginalised communities which were disproportionately affected by State violence as well as other social sequelae that were exacerbated by the pandemic (Bowman, 2020).

The decolonial turn has, in recent years, been an especially prominent pathway into politicising psychology in SA (Maldonado-Torres, 2017). It is perhaps more appropriate, though, to think of this turn in the plural – as a multitude of turns that seek to put psychology to the work of decoloniality while, at the same time, addressing colonial residues, legacies and currents operating within psychology. In facing psychology towards political questions in very powerful ways, these decolonising turns have connected psychologists working in SA with a global network of decolonising psychological scholars and practitioners (e.g., Readsura Decolonial Collective, 2022). This work, it should be emphasised, does not represent a break from the politicised psychological work that was occurring in the 1980s and 1990s (e.g., Seedat et al., 1988). Rather, it is a continuation of these efforts to resist the dominance of Eurocentric currents in psychology and society more broadly.

Politicised practices of psychology have always been met with resistance from those invested in what we might think of as ruling psychologies (Seedat & Suffla, 2017). There have been instances where psychology and psychologists in SA adopted the language of radicality while remaining committed to a rather conservative practice. Psychology's desire for institutionalisation, to be taken seriously as a legitimate natural science-like discipline and professional practice, has meant that all over the world, psychology has become part of a project of individualising social suffering (Teo & Afşin, 2020). For such a psychology, the problem lies not in the organisation of society, but in the mindsets, constitutions and capabilities of individuals who cannot keep apace of western modernity.

Psychology has struggled to break from its tendency to look inwards, even when it looks outwards (Malherbe & Dlamini, 2020). Simply acknowledging social forces within psychology is not enough. A politicising psychology is compelled to leverage its scholarship and expertise to argue against structural inequalities and advocate for the marginalised. Doing so is imperative to enable psychology to transform and evince a 'more human face' (Biko, 2004, p. 108). PsySSA's recent attempt to engage the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) regarding voting rights for people with psychological illness is an example of a step in this direction, but much more is needed. Psychology must be seen to be *doing* social justice work, rather than simply speaking and theorising about it.

Attempts to politicise psychology can be understood as turning away from the colonial episteme that has come to define so much of psychological practice and research, and to think about what psychological work might mean outside of the confines of psychology (Malherbe & Dlamini, 2020). While it may certainly be strategic for psychological work to be recognised as psychology (e.g., for funding and credibility), there are also moments when politicising psychology may require psychological practitioners to leave behind psychology and to take up psycho-political work that has little or nothing to do with psychology (e.g., engaging with the psychologically exacting demands of movement-building). The future of a politicising psychology may, in some ways, depend on how we move within and beyond psychology (Maldonado-Torres, 2021).

Despite being very publicly asserted, the project of politicising psychology towards just goals remains a relatively marginal pursuit in SA. This is, of course, also reflective of global psychologies. The majority of psychological practitioners are not necessarily invested in or trained to contemplate ways in which we can propel psychology forward in politically progressive ways. Psychology has, historically, attracted liberal and conservative proponents. Progressively oriented psychological practitioners oftentimes leave organisations like PsySSA when they are unable to gain wide support for their political commitments. This creates an understandable sense of frustration among those psychologists who are impatient for change. And although we should not conflate psychological organisations with psychology itself, these organisations nonetheless play an important role in both expanding and limiting political opportunities for psychological practice, pedagogy and social transformation.

Politicising psychology towards social justice in SA has, today, continued to be an intermittently successful undertaking. For the most part, the politicised project within psychology has not had a meaningful impact in SA. Psychology has contributed only marginally to addressing the vexing

problems of our time. This speaks to the recurring problem of relevance in psychology – if, indeed, *relevance* remains the most appropriate language to use here (Long, 2013). In a curious way, politicising psychology frequently manifests as a personal or small group project, one that leaves progressive, critical and radical psychologists disappointed in themselves as well as their discipline, practice and its institutions. The question as to whether one has done enough to propel psychology in a political direction is always being raised among psychologists. It is by repeatedly asking this question that we fuel the desire to drive the incomplete project of politicising psychology.

Looking ahead: South African psychology in the world

PsySSA was tasked with conceptualising and practicing psychology otherwise in the ruins of apartheid. Indeed, there was incredible excitement when PsySSA was formed in 1994, and much of that excitement needs to be recaptured today by making psychology socially and politically relevant. In looking ahead, psychology must engage with the continuities of racialised, gendered, socio-economic and sectarian/partisan inequalities which persist throughout the country. A relevant psychology for our time must also engage with the questions of climate change, infrastructural malaise, State abandonment and betrayal. In working for projects that seek to counter the contemporary politics of detritus, neglect and abandonment (a politics that rule over the vast majority of the global population), psychology must strive towards a more humanising orientation and recognise the agentic capacities of human beings to emerge and thrive, despite and against these adversities. We should not lose sight of what is among psychology's core contributions: understanding how the social and the political spheres of our lives are always also psychological, and the ways in which such an understanding can contribute to our ability to better serve humanity.

In thinking through the future of psychology in SA, we need not let go of an internationalist perspective. South African psychologists have, after all, made considerable knowledge contributions on the global stage (see, for example, S. R. Pillay et al., 2019; Readsura Decolonial Collective, 2022). As thinkers outside of psychology (e.g., Biko, 2004; Hountondji, 1996; Ramose, 1999) and within it (e.g., Manganyi, 2019) have made clear, thinking and acting from Africa has something important, something humanising, to offer the world. We only need to look at climate change to see how we are all interconnected. We need to think through these connections from where we stand in SA. How we connect with and contribute to continental and global psychological knowledge is determined by our position in SA (Ratele, 2019). An important development in this area was PsySSA's move in 2012 to establish the Pan-African Psychology Union (PAPU), a 'collaborative union of psychological societies in Africa committed to scholarship and human development in our communities, countries, Africa and the world' (PAPU, 2012, p. 1). Psychologists in SA, in their individual capacities and through their collectives and institutions, like PAPU and PsySSA, can offer particular, humanising ways of thinking about our world as well as the world in which we want to live. Here, we are once again challenged to unify and honour the multiple, contradictory and agonistic voices which comprise psychology.

Technology also throws up important, yet often neglected, considerations for psychology. Psychology in SA must embrace rather than ignore or turn its back on technological developments in and beyond the country. This may include the manner by which online interactivity is shaping human psychology (e.g., Li et al., 2022), while also grappling with the stark digital divide in SA (Mignamissi, 2021). PsySSA's recently established Artificial Intelligence interest group, as well as its pivot to online modes of engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic, reflects important developments in this regard.

Many critically minded psychologists in SA feel a tremendous ambivalence, and even hostility, towards psychology. Nonetheless, there are those psychologists who remain hopeful. While

psychology's role in the social sphere has many times been shameful, there are also many politically oriented psychologists doing important, socially just work. As we have noted, psychology in SA has taken and must take heed of imperatives like human rights and social justice, technological developments and standpoint epistemologies. In looking ahead, psychology in SA is called upon to remain attentive to the most pressing epistemological and socio-political concerns of the moment; attuning itself to the potential critical turns that may emerge beyond decoloniality. The future of psychology in SA thus requires our dialectical appraisement, one that takes seriously psychology's achievements and its limitations. We can and must acknowledge psychology's shortcomings, and from these shortcomings excavate possibilities and potential. The future of psychology, after all, depends on it.

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Notes

1. The *Employment Equity Act [No. 55 of 1998]* can be found here: https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/a55-98ocr.pdf
2. The *National Mental Health Policy Framework and Strategic Plan 2023–2030* can be found here: https://www.spotlightnsp.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/NMHP-FINAL-APPROVED-ON-30.04.2023.pdf
3. In quoting Smangele Magwaza, the former chair of FAP, Painter et al. (2013, p. 855) recount that FAP's purpose was always 'to extend our psychological paradigms and embrace Africanness – identity, culture, experiences as well as create a state of unease around the current ideological constraints and stasis of mainstream psychology'.
4. This Position Statement from PsySSA in solidarity with the Palestinian people can be found here: https://www.psyssa.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/PsySSA_Position-Statement-from-the-Psychological-Society-of-South-Africa-PsySSA-in-Solidarity-with-the-Palestinian-Peoples.pdf

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