

Psychology, Conflict, and Peace in South Africa: Historical Notes

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Three historical developments in the history of South African psychology are examined in this article, in the light of an analytical framework that stresses the multiple origins of psychology, its practical-applied nature, and the inherent links between its knowledge production and societal conflict. The three developments are: the early mental testing movement in South Africa and its concern with racial ability, psychologists' involvement with poverty, and the schismatic nature of psychological associations in South Africa. The article concludes with a suggestion that psychologists can promote peace via a preventive psychology that will emphasize values such as health, happiness, and justice.

In June 1995, the Fourth International Symposium on the Contributions of Psychology to Peace took place in Cape Town, South Africa. The fact that it was organised in South Africa was a clear recognition of the country's bitter past, and an acknowledgment of its recent democratic transformation. The aim of this article is to discuss the historical relation between psychology and societal conflict in South Africa—to establish a rudimentary shared knowledge of this local history among participants in the symposium.

In the first part of the article, we try to establish an analytic framework to think about the historical relation between developments in society and changes in psychology. The second part examines three aspects of South African psychology, with this framework as background.

THE MULTIPLE ORIGINS OF PSYCHOLOGY

It is now generally accepted that psychology as a discipline had more than one origin, as it came into existence during the second half of the 19th century. Indeed, one can discern three sources: in the fusion of physiology and philosophy, in the practice of what became known as psychotherapy, and in the mental testing movement. Helmholtz and Wundt are mainly responsible for the first lineage of psychology, which produced the image of psychology as a laboratory-based experimental science. Charcot and Freud inaugurated the practice of mental healing, while Galton, Cattell, and Binet founded the psychology of individual differences.

Thus, two of the three origins of psychology are intrinsically related to the practical demands of everyday life. Around the turn of the century, in countries like England, France, Austria, and the United States, new social institutions were created, or old ones were transformed, when what has been called the Second Industrial Revolution gathered speed (Van Hoorn & Verhave, 1977). To name but a few of these institutions: schools, prisons, military parade grounds, mechanizing factories, mental hospitals, and the consulting rooms for private psychotherapy. It is in these institutions that the most important origins of psychology are to be found.

Concomitant to the Second Industrial Revolution, technical and social progress became increasingly reliant on scientific insights (Pieterse, 1981). Technical science was discovered and soon used widely as a powerful factor in advancing industrial production and ameliorating problematic industrial relations. Also, the managing of human and social affairs very soon became a scientific enterprise (Noble, 1977). Just as the natural sciences were useful in the solution of the problems related to processes of production, so the social and human sciences (that now reconstituted themselves as practical and technical endeavors) could be used to help solve the human problems within the institutions just mentioned.

Thus, the science of psychology does not stem only from the experimental investigations of human adult consciousness. Much more important, it emerged simultaneously as a practical-applied discipline that addressed itself to the individually experienced problems (mental or behavioral) of everyday life. This is why psychology presents a Janus-face to the world: As a practical and applied field, it shows its close links with technics and technology; as a "theoretical" discipline, producing generally valid theories, it reveals its orientation toward "science."

In advanced industrial and postindustrial societies, education, health, and labour have become key social issues, more than ever. The division of labour, both in terms of the subdivision of labour tasks and the distribution of jobs across members of society, is at the core of most social policies. Under rapidly changing employment conditions, in increasingly heterogeneous societies, the question of how to educate and train for a future that is ever more unpredictable remains a perplexing problem.

In addition, the promotion of physical and mental health, and access to health services, are major policy concerns of governments worldwide.

Psychology, especially in its practical-applied aspect, always has been closely associated with the institutions of education, health, and labour. For psychology to become the discipline it is, it had to show that what it produced was valuable to different sectors in these institutions. The contributions of psychologists were acceptable insofar as they permitted institutional goals to be achieved more efficiently and insofar as they provided a justification for institutional practices that might arouse opposition. To put it differently: Psychology had to establish its legitimacy in society, by standards prevailing in that society. Only then could it mobilize the resources on which its life as a discipline depended (see Danziger, 1990).

The human problems experienced in these institutions, therefore, always are connected in some way or another to divisions or conflicts in society. The formulation of what counts as problems too often is done by those with a certain kind of interest and power: Danziger (1990), for example, showed how the development of mass testing methods in the United States coalesced with the need of educational administrators for a technique to sort large numbers of individuals. The reference made earlier to the difficult policy decisions governments have to make indicates that in any one of these spheres of social life there exists a divergence of interests and conflicting aspirations. Practical-applied psychologies, such as educational, testing, industrial, clinical, military, forensic, advertising, health, and abnormal psychology, are not neutral vis-à-vis these interests and aspirations; in short, vis-à-vis societal conflicts.

SOUTH AFRICAN PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIETAL CONFLICT

South African psychology also perceived its legitimacy in society as closely related to the social value of its knowledge products. Put in terms of the previous discussion, it means that psychology in this country also sought support in sources external to it; in addressing the human problems experienced in the institutions of education, labour, and health.

Given South Africa's apartheid past, emphasis will be on the relation between psychology and these divisions in this society. It stands to reason that the discipline would address itself to significant issues in society—the pressing questions of the day. And for South African psychologists, as for American psychologists before World War II (at least), matters of race, and racial domination, were perceived as significant and as critical. In this second part of the article, we examine the challenge of legitimacy for South African psychology, and how it elicited different responses at different times. In the rest, we sketch three such developments in this country,

by way of an illustration of the framework outlined in the first part of the article, and by way of an historical introduction to the relation between racial domination, the societal conflict it engendered, and psychology.

Social Policy, Mental Testing, and the Politics of Knowledge

How shall the various "races" live together peacefully in South Africa? This was, for a good few centuries, the abiding question for (White) South Africans. It is often assumed that 1948, the year the National Party came into power in South Africa, marked the beginning of apartheid. Such a view, however, neglects the extent to which intergroup relations had already been structured judicially by that time. By the end of the 19th century, three possibilities were identified to deal with "the racial problem": assimilation, segregation, and repression. Repression was unacceptable, and as the 19th century drew to a close, the strategy of integration or assimilation of the races, in which the "backward races" would be "civilized," was being abandoned for one of segregation (e.g., see Parry, 1983). In the period between the two world wars, a number of significant laws were passed by the South African parliament to formalize and extend this segregation: laws that set aside certain areas for Africans, prevented Africans from purchasing land outside these "reserves," introduced compulsory residential segregation of Africans and restricted their movement to urban areas, reserved certain jobs in the mining industry, for example, for Whites only, and so forth.

By the 1920s, scientists, whether liberal or conservative, were fairly unanimous that sound reasons existed for segregating the races. But why? The introduction of laws and measures to treat the races differently required a systematic justification for why this should be the case. One possibility that existed was that Black and White were essentially different, and had to be treated differently. Attempts to establish such differences, therefore, were encouraged, and for psychologists, this was translated quite easily into a concern with measurement of mental ability.

The 1920s became characterized by the rapid development of a number of psychological tests of ability, among which intellectual ability was paramount, and by the utilization of these tests across the races to find out how they stood in relation to ability. Needless to say, Whites consistently performed better on these tests than Blacks. Fick (1939), for example, found that the mental age of the African population as measured by intelligence tests was between 4 and 5 years below that of Europeans.

The interpretation of the results of ability and aptitude tests, however, produced a lot of uncertainty and disagreement. For some, they indicated inherited ability: "This inferiority, occurring in certain tests in which learning or environmental conditions were equalised for the Native and European groups does not appear to be of a temporary nature" (Fick, 1939, p. 56). For others, with a more liberal political

orientation, they were the result of environmentally determined factors, and it was argued that education would decrease these differences (see Dubow, 1995; Louw, 1997, for a full discussion of these developments).

However, it is the potential policy conclusions drawn as a result of these findings that are of more interest here. To start with, education would be wasted on Africans if the differences were permanent (i.e., innate). In the foreword to Fick's book mentioned previously, this was written:

Dr. Fick has ... shown convincingly that the Native is not educable in precisely the same way as the European. ... trying to educate the Native in the time honoured way, with which we are familiar, we may be leading them into a cul-de-sac and thus retard their development. We should therefore ... ascertain along which lines the Native is educable and to remould our education policy accordingly. (Eiselen, cited in Fick, 1939, p. iv)

The possibility even existed that political rights could be apportioned according to mental ability:

There can be one, and only one adequate reason justifying differentiation, and that is if the native can be proved to have an inferior intelligence to the European. In that case, that is, if he is really at the mental level of a child, we obviously cannot trust him with the vote or with other privileges of full citizenship. (Minde, 1937, p. 249)

In South Africa too, science, or psychology, therefore, was seen as a force in providing solutions to social and political problems. Mental testing, so it seemed, enabled the psychologist to determine abilities and aptitudes "scientifically." This was seen as a major contribution toward an understanding of "the native mind," and the possibility was entertained that it could produce results to assist in the administrative and legislative regulation of relations between the races.

Poverty

The crucial change in South African psychology began immediately after World War II, when European colonial empires were dismantled. With this process, the order of European racial domination began to disappear as well. The postwar policy of apartheid in South Africa may be seen as an attempt to counteract these historical developments by intensified efforts to maintain racial domination. This period has now drawn to an end.

How have these changes influenced psychological practice? Let us first look at the early effects of decolonization on South African psychology. Given the earlier emphasis on the external legitimation of psychology, psychologists kept the question in mind: "How can psychological practices be justified in a new regime?"

Traditions in the social and human sciences are profoundly affected by sociopolitical change. Practitioners in these sciences may search for new research and practice priorities and new justifications of them. In a new regime, attempts have to be made to demonstrate the ideological acceptability and usefulness of psychology. The discipline attempts to legitimate its activities in this way. We shall see this most clearly by referring to the activities of the first and second Carnegie investigations into poverty.

The first Carnegie Commission conducted an investigation into "White" poverty in the 1930s. The second, in the 1980s, was an investigation into "Black" poverty. Blacks had been poor in the 1930s, but they were not powerful "clients" of psychology at that time. White South Africa was more concerned with the "scandalous" fact that there were Whites who were almost as poor as Blacks. But by the 1980s, the political status of Blacks had improved.

As a result of mainly agricultural and industrial conditions around the turn of the century, a large number of Whites became so poor that their presence was construed as a social problem in the racially ordered South African society. Since the 1890s, concerns were expressed in various quarters about this phenomenon, but it was not until the 1920s and 1930s that social scientists addressed the "poor-White problem." A massive investigation, even by today's standards, was launched with money from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and psychologists played a prominent role in it. The major significance of this investigation for South African psychology was that it formed the foundation of professional psychology in this country. In this investigation, psychologists were able to demonstrate their usefulness in the solution of societal problems, and thus brought the skills of psychologists in the public eye. In this first Carnegie investigation into (White) poverty, the underachievement of poor White children at school and on psychometric tests was attributed to numerous factors, chief among them malnutrition and poor education. Although the investigation itself did not solve the problem, it contributed to large amounts of state funding for introducing feeding schemes in the White schools and improved educational facilities for White children. Despite pleas made at the time, a similar feeding scheme was not introduced for Black children.

Fleisch (1995) argued that the real significance of this Commission's work lay in the way it strengthened the exemplar of the social scientist as policy maker. The Commission produced "facts" about a social problem, in terms of numbers, failure rates at school, intelligence scores, vocational aspirations, and so forth. On the basis of these facts, recommendations were made regarding the state's involvement in social problems, and the formulation of social policy about education, racial segregation, employment, and much more. Fleisch quoted examples to indicate that these recommendations indeed did have the intended policy impact. As a result, psychological testing too was promoted in a similar fashion. Intelligence tests were introduced in White schools as a diagnostic tool to assign "the feeble-minded" to special schools, and to channel pupils into different ability groups (see also Louw

& Foster, 1991). By the end of the 1930s, intelligence testing was firmly established as an instrument of social planning in education for White pupils.

The second Carnegie Investigation into poverty, this time into Black poverty, was launched and completed in the 1980s. It was estimated that about a third of Black South African children were suffering from the effects of malnutrition (Wilson & Ramphele, 1989). The investigation included a number of projects involving psychological aspects of poverty; for example, psychological deprivation theories in education, psychological effects of unemployment, childhood head injuries, and malnutrition. The policy outcome of this second report is still unclear. Liddel and Kvalsvig (1990) expressed their concern at this "uneven treatment of the same psychological and social issue (i.e., malnutrition and its effects on children's competence) according to the particular ethnic group affected by it" (p. 2).

It is not clear as yet how South African psychologists might respond in the future to the massive challenge of Black poverty, and whether it will lead to a similar sea-change in the discipline as happened after the poor White investigation. One recent book, by Dawes and Donald (1994), contains hints that this may be the case, as it addresses the nature and psychological consequences of adversity experienced by the majority of children in South Africa, in one or more of the following forms: economic stress, malnutrition, other diseases of poverty, and living on the streets. Another trend seems to be to turn to community psychology as a new paradigm that could be used to restore a sense of power to individuals and communities. This paradigm is perceived as less authoritarian and directive, and more participative and activist in what it does, than the highly professionalized character of much of mainstream psychology. Community psychology is promoted as an approach that would give more of a voice to the less powerful in society, which would bring psychology closer to these groups, and that would be an alternative to a psychology that is rooted in Western culture and insensitive to the local sociopolitical context.

National Associations

Divisions and conflict in society also pull apart. In South Africa, after World War II, the race issue increasingly came to divide South African psychologists. As South African race politics increasingly became out of step with the trend in other parts of the world, so did the political divisions within the psychology profession diverge. The most dramatic expression of this occurred in 1961, when the national psychological association, the South African Psychological Association (SAPA), split into two when the first applications for membership were received from Black psychologists. When SAPA decided to allow members of all races into the association, another association, the Psychological Institute of the Republic of South Africa (PIRSA) was formed, consisting of mainly Afrikaans-speaking psychologists. This new association allowed only Whites to have membership (Louw, 1987).

The formal organisation of psychology in this country continued to be extremely fractious. At various stages in the 1980s, four associations of psychologists existed: SAPA, PIRSA, the Organization for Appropriate Social Services in South Africa (OASSSA), and the Psychology and Apartheid Committee.

OASSSA was formed in 1983, to “examine and research the causes of social and personal problems,” in which it is stressed that “Apartheid and economic exploitation provide the base for poor living conditions, work alienation and race and sex discrimination which are antithetical to mental health.” As a result, OASSSA aligned itself much more explicitly with antiapartheid and mass democratic forces in South Africa.

In South Africa, the increasing numbers of Black psychologists (albeit slow increases) created powerful resistance from within the discipline to the political conflict in the country. One important group in this regard was a number of psychologists who in the 1980s organized under the banner of the Psychology and Apartheid Committee. Most were based in Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Boston (United States), and their activities culminated in 1989 in the first Psychology and Apartheid Conference in Cape Town. The Black/White schism was sharply defined by the conference, as it was arranged by Black psychologists, and Black psychologists were the majority in attendance, were the keynote speakers, and formulated the agenda (to paraphrase the organizers).

This demonstrates how one of the important extra-disciplinary forces in bringing about changes in the discipline is the entry of previously underrepresented groups into the discipline. On a global scale, one can refer to the decline of the American hegemony in psychology, and the psychologists of Asia, Africa, and Latin America finding a voice of their own, and raising questions about their own traditions and their relation to the practice and theory of psychology (Danziger, 1994).

Between 1961 and 1983, two psychological associations, SAPA and PIRSA, existed in South Africa. In 1983, they amalgamated to form the Psychological Association of South Africa (PASA). An important factor in this process was a major shift in political rhetoric, which had moved toward the “reform” of old style apartheid. The kind of racial exclusivity as practised by PIRSA, therefore, was simply out of date. Despite this, PASA still did not attract Black membership. It was said quite often that there was little evidence of PASA members being aware of the brutal legacy of apartheid. In short, PASA was part and parcel of a reform approach to social change. As an editorial in *Psychology in Society* stated:

The organisation of psychology has been a very vexed issue in South Africa. ... The history of the organisation of psychology in South Africa has been inextricably linked to apartheid ideology and discourse. ... Broadly speaking, but not necessarily inaccurately, PASA has tended to side with the status quo of apartheid South Africa, and has not seriously challenged the imbalances of power and privilege in this society. (Editorial, 1992, p. 1)

In 1992, it was decided that PASA should be dissolved and that "representatives of PASA and various other groupings are to form a Steering Committee with the purpose of 'establishing a new national Psychological Association of South Africa which will be truly representative of South African psychologists'" (*PsiMonitor*, 1992, p. 1). Again, it was the heady mixture of politics and psychology's attempts to form a national association that provided the ingredients of yet another "crisis" in South African psychology. But at least now the motivation was to "reflect the wide diversity of psychology in South Africa" in this new association. In January 1994, the new national association, the Psychological Society of South Africa, was launched.

OASSSA also has not escaped the consequences of the political events of the last 5 years. In fact, it disbanded in 1992 to amalgamate with other "health workers" into a united body, the South African Health and Social Services Organisation.

This discussion shows how divisions in society, and the politics accompanying such divisions, divide the psychological community as well; secondly, that there always was a diversity of positions, as different alliances were formed between various groups of psychologists and the political struggle against apartheid. In the last 5 years, the imperative for psychologists to show that they will be ideologically acceptable and even useful under changed political circumstances has increased exponentially.

CONCLUSION

In terms of the analytic framework presented earlier, psychology in this country, as in other countries as well, expressed its disciplinary identity hand in hand with a formulation of a societal identity. To be successful and to have legitimacy, it had to be in step with changing social relations. These thumbnail sketches of three developments in the history of psychology in South Africa provide ample illustration of how difficult it is for psychologists not to become enmeshed in societal conflict, when they try to be "in step with social relations." Indeed, following the argument in Part I of this article, we would argue that it is impossible to do so. During the 1980s, when the struggle against apartheid was at its fiercest, some South African psychologists committed themselves quite unequivocally to this struggle, as the earlier reference to OASSSA suggested. Generally referred to at the time as "progressive" psychologists, they identified themselves with a political position that called for a nonracial democratic order in South Africa. These psychologists, who by and large were younger than their colleagues and less well represented in positions of power in South African psychology, sought to research and intervene in the sociopolitical conflicts of the time.

Because psychological practice acts as such an important source of psychological knowledge, the actions of the professional psychologist who works in the main

fields of psychological practice (labour, education, and health) have the potential either to increase or decrease societal conflict. There are numerous examples from elsewhere in the world, apart from the way that South African psychologists before 1980 took racial domination and conflict as a defining feature of their activities. Wars are perhaps the most extreme example: It is well known how the First World War "put psychological testing on the map" (Samelson, 1979). Another extreme example can be drawn from Nazi Germany, where an alliance of psychology with the interests of the military, of industry, and of education, afforded psychology a unique opportunity to transform itself into a profession sanctioned and recognized by the state (Geuter, 1992). In all of this, we have to ask ourselves: Have psychological interventions been to the advantage of society as a whole, or did they entrench established interests?

Our position is that psychologists have found it all too easy over the years to ignore this question. For example, in the treatment particularly of the poor White problem in South Africa, the outcome was predictable: Whites had to be uplifted, Blacks were neglected, and the social distance between Black and White was increased. Thus, psychology has often been described as an establishment-oriented discipline, because it sought legitimacy by appealing to dominant and powerful groups. Yet psychology also contains within itself the potential to emancipate individuals from inner compulsions, and groups from coercion and domination.

What is the way forward for psychology in this area of life? We think in the previously mentioned themes already we see the future direction of psychology: transforming the curative role of the discipline into one of prevention. As liberal democratic societies themselves change, so psychology again changes with them. For political leaders in established and emerging democracies, major challenges are the redistribution of available labour, and the promotion of physical and mental health for all members of society. In postapartheid South Africa, these are particularly acute considerations, and psychologists already are moving in that direction.

Community psychology was referred to earlier: It forms part of a national prioritizing of primary health care programmes and of the central government's commitment to public health. Although much psychological work has shifted to primary prevention (e.g., work on the prevention of violence done by the Health Psychology Unit of the University of South Africa), the legacy of apartheid still creates a demand for curative services, as provided, for example, by the Trauma Centre for Victims of Violence and Torture in Cape Town. It provides psychological, medical, and social services to individuals, families, and communities affected by political violence.

To become a preventive discipline within such changing circumstances sets a clear and great task for psychology. Van Hoorn (1989) has identified at least three domains of activity for a preventive practical-applied psychology: in environmental policies (city planning, housing, an environment conducive to a healthy way of life); in direct preventive endeavors in fields such as education, labour, and mental

health care; and in reintegrating the individual into the family, neighbourhood, and society-at-large. This kind of psychology will place health, happiness, justice, and equity on the political agenda. These factors can all be seen as equivalent to peace, or at least that peace will be a consequence of the promotion of these values.

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