

Derek Hook (2012), *A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial: The Mind of Apartheid*, London: Routledge, ISBN 978-0-415-58757-0, 251 pp.

*A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial: The Mind of Apartheid* explores the influential written works and political activism of writers and numerous anticolonial figures, including Steve Biko and J. M. Coetzee. In doing so, Derek Hook discusses how their works have significantly extended the critical, psychological and theoretical examination of racism and oppression. South Africa is the chosen contextual backdrop, used to highlight how racism and colonial ideas persist in a post-Apartheid world. The introduction begins by quoting extensively two narrative accounts from the “Apartheid Archive Project”. These passages are then analysed to stress how white racism can be understood to have been the “mind of Apartheid” during that era (3). The effect of racism on one’s identity is then explored and remains an ever-present issue throughout the text.

Chapter 1, “The postcolonial, the psychopolitical, Black Consciousness and vernacular psychology”, begins by pointing to the lack of texts which intertwine psychology with postcolonial theory. Focus turns to Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*. Hook notes, “if there is a fact that Fanon’s writings impress upon us, it is that the colonial encounter is unprecedented; the epistemic, cultural, psychic and physical violence of colonialism makes for a unique type of historical trauma” (17). Fanon’s text is used to stress the combination of “psychology and politics” (17), an issue expounded when Hook’s attention later turns to Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement. “A fundamental challenge for Black Consciousness lay with reversing the colonial imprint of a negative self-image, and replacing it with positive, more self-affirming forms of black identity and culture” (24). Hook ends the chapter by stressing “the indispensable role Black Consciousness played – precisely as a psychopolitical form – in providing valuable psychological foundations for liberation” (36).

The second chapter, “Abjection as a political factor”, refers once again to *Black Skin, White Masks*, this time underlining “the essentially *traumatic* quality of racism – the traumatic, as rupture of bodily and ego boundaries, as failure of symbolic processing” (46). The chapter argues that “a supplementary form of analysis is required in this respect, one better able to grapple with the traumatic ‘reals’ – excesses of affect, ‘impossibilities’ of bodily and societal harmonization – that condition (post)colonial racism” (47). Hook also engages with racism and discourse to consider “the limitations of discourse analytic conceptualizations of racism” (49). He further notes that the notion that “language can never say it all” (64) means there is a space for the

“extra-discursive” (66). The chapter, whose initial focus was on trauma, draws to a close by connecting it to the discussion of the extra-discursive.

Chapter 3, “Postcolonial psychoanalysis: Fanon, desire, fantasy and libidinal economy”, has three main objectives, which are all intertwined: to further develop the text’s exploration of racism through the route of psychoanalysis; to “interrogate the usefulness of psychoanalytic terminology and description as it comes to be applied to the societal and political domain” (95); and to highlight how racism “presents a far more complex conjunction of desire, fantasy and libidinal investment” (95). Chapter 3 centres on *Black Skin, White Masks* and J. M. Coetzee’s “The Mind of Apartheid: Geoffrey Cronjé” and argues that “the psychoanalytic theorization of the postcolonial – and of racism in particular – is as of yet an unfinished project” (99).

Chapter 4, “The stereotype, colonial discourse, fetish and racism”, offers a close reading of Homi Bhabha’s paper “The Other Question” by way of examining “forms of racism within postcolonial contexts” (158). The chapter also looks into “the paradoxes of racism” (163) and the intricacies of colonial discourse. The latter consideration is extended with reference to Edward Said’s *Orientalism*. The chapter then turns to questioning how the “Freudian account of fetishism illuminate[s] the functioning of racial stereotypes” (184). The book’s final chapter, “The ‘real’ of racializing embodiment”, focuses on the work of Black Consciousness psychologist Chabani Manganyi and delves into “the cultural and political dimensions of the crisis of embodiment via both psychoanalytic and phenomenological perspectives” (8). The final chapter also succeeds in returning the reader’s attention to the overarching aims of the text as a whole, bringing together all the themes previously touched upon in the earlier chapters.

The language used in *A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial: The Mind of Apartheid* is clear throughout, and technical terms are helpfully accompanied by definitions when necessary. Although each chapter is packed with interconnected arguments and theories, the book’s overall focus is always revisited at the end of each chapter. Hook’s thought-provoking text is an essential read for students of all levels who wish to gain a more detailed understanding of the criticism and theories surrounding the discussion of racism and social psychology in post-Apartheid states.

- Danielle Faye Tran