

*A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial: The Mind of Apartheid*

Derek Hook

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Derek Hook's *A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial: The Mind of Apartheid*, provides a critical psychology of Apartheid racism. Hook aims to examine racism's obdurate persistence, invoking psychological categories without depoliticising his object of study. There is a dual subject of analysis here, since white self-fashioning, as Fanon tells us, is propped upon black objectification. Understandably, Hook enlists theorists such as Fanon, Bhabha, Lacan, Kristeva, Coetzee, Manganyi, and Biko to assist him in his task, but the writing is always attentive to the anxieties of interdisciplinary work—anxieties born of psychology's resistance to theory and of postcolonial studies' occasionally disparate and cavalier appropriations of psychoanalysis. *A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial* structures its chapters around key topics: resistance psychology, aversive racism, unconscious racism, stereotyping, and embodiment.

Chapter 1 advances the pioneering concept of the psychopolitical, which has three immediate analytical yields: placing personal concerns in the register of the political, showing how psychology reveals the workings of power, and using psychological insights to consolidate resistances to power. The last of these three yields is derived from an attentive and innovative reading of Steve Biko's theorization of Black Consciousness, which is not narrowly essentialist, but a "collective form of hope and security" that "utilises the vernacular of the psychological" (25). Black Consciousness method, Hook argues, is an "affective solidarity," a "marshalling of affect," and ultimately a "commitment of love" (32).

Chapter 2 begins with a brilliant Lacanian exposition of racism's mechanism, in which we find a "body-ego-symbolic series of expulsions," such that the black subject is repeatedly and at multiple levels confronted with the real of their extra-symbolic denigration (46-7). The body here retains latent non-discursive registers that might return re-activated or converted affects to the political. Treading an elegant line between discourse analysis (which risks reducing racism to talk) and a material critique (foregrounding societal institutions at the risk of forgetting the racist's hate-fuelled *jouissance*), Hook argues that psychology allows us to understand the extra-discursive registers of the affective, the experiential, and the embodied (52-55). The extra-discursive, he argues, may function without becoming extra-symbolic (59). The real in this structure takes the form of a dislocation of body from the ego, the libidinal intensities that are unamenable to translation, and the "unthinkable" categories in racist ideology (62-63). A key move, therefore, is to consider the category of the abject, in

which the boundary transactions of the subject amount to “affective, bodily and pre-propositional” (71) forms of extra-discursive valuation. The abject, in Hook’s inspired argument, enables a “subliminal type of questioning [. . .] a prurient enquiry precisely into the enjoyments” of others, which allows repulsion and fascination to operate ambivalently even as the other is socially placed (72). Since the self never wholly separates from what it repudiates, the abject draws the racist into a confrontation with the limits of their own self-making and sense-making. However, Hook goes further to argue that the abject is “a capsizing of symbolic means, a disabling of the apparatuses of differentiation and separation” (79).

Chapter 3 relates Fanonian thought to the idea of a trans-individual unconscious, in which the subject is positioned endlessly according to the other’s desire: what does he or she want? Given colonialism’s destabilization of the subject, it becomes possible to countenance the psychopathology of colonial life. Likewise, following Bhabha, Hook suggests that identity constitution is haunted by the ambivalences of identification, such that the phobic thrust of racism is a defense against the apprehension of the self’s resemblances with the other. In an extended discussion of Fanon, Hook thinks through epidermalization as an environmental category (being subject to the other’s scrambling gaze) leading to the other’s traumatic introjection of the racist’s constructions. In this sense, the black subject is interrelated in an “imaginary relation of fractured specularity” (115). However, Hook is careful to place colonialism itself within the circuit of desire, to avoid lapsing into the simplifying psychodiagnostics of relation. Likewise, he cautions readers against “conflating discursive and psychical registers of analysis” (124). Hook’s solution is to turn to group psychology and its libidinal economies, including its imaginary constructions of the ideal ego and its “pantheon of ego-ideals that link the history of a given group or nation to its present” (131). This allows him to read racism as an inverse valuation: the other is blamed for possessing in abundance those cherished qualities or enjoyments that the subject presumes themselves not to have. For instance, the supposedly libidinal black man compensates in fantasmatic and exaggerated form for the racist’s anxieties about loss or castration.

Chapter 4 turns towards Bhabha and defines the other as “a set of nervous investments in both practices of knowledge production and processes of identification” (160). To this extent, Hook is able to define colonial discourse as “a kind of self-making in which a particular order of sense [. . .] is attained and secured” (173). Hook reads Bhabha’s emphasis on ambivalence as a productively irresolvable mode, in which the supposed fixity of the stereotype is in every instance shadowed by anxiety and disavowal. He persuasively argues that Bhabha’s critique of Said consists in bringing latent and manifest Orientalisms into interplay, in which the historical and epistemic forms of colonial discourse are confronted by their unconscious, desiring modes. The fetish, Hook argues, is a device that permits the management of “co-present and yet opposed beliefs” (179). For this reason, it plays a key role in structuring an identity that the

other's presence both guarantees and threatens—in a double movement that is simultaneously narcissistic and aggressive. Hook argues brilliantly that the fantasmatic scene of loss for which the fetish compensates, both precedes and structures the reality in which it operates. In this sense, racism must be endlessly re-performed to avert the subject's lack.

To break this circuit, Hook engineers an innovation in his final chapter—what psychoanalysis takes as its founding premise is the “incompleteness of the subject to themselves” (204). A key form of this incompleteness is the problem of embodiment, of negotiating the body's errant and abject capacity to thwart our constructions. Influenced by South African psychologist, Chabani Manganyi, Hook asks: “Why allocate this crass corporeality to some other abjected social figure rather than simply assume and own it?” (207). For Manganyi, this is a universal problem of disturbing physicality—the body encodes the subject's limitation, because corporeal changes and developments are underpinned by the eventual necessity of death. If racism orients and symbolizes the body in hierarchies of consequence, then Black Consciousness is a response that reclaims and rehabilitates the bodies of the oppressed for the purposes of the political. Hook recognizes the power of this insight: “Racial difference, we might venture, is given a radical reality, substantiated as a mode of being. Race here is not simply a reality of meaning or signification, but a ‘holistic’ experiential reality of embodied, affective and spiritual depth” (211).

However, if there is a drawback in the monograph's conclusion, it is that Hook seems unable to advance beyond the non-sublating dialectic of “embodied absence and disembodied presence” (218). This is in part because the irresolvable dichotomy of symbolic structure and affective experience is itself a problematic of embodiment more generally. While Hook concludes that this leaves us with an analytical framework with which to be vigilant to the work of perennial racisms, one has to wonder wherein the therapeutic project of this psychoanalysis or the political project of this version of the postcolonial resides. The major lacuna in this conclusion possibly derives from Hook's reading of Fanon, which downplays the rehabilitative and rehumanising collective struggle found in later Fanonian thought. However, it might equally derive from the structural tensions between psychoanalysis (a curative art) and politics (a violent praxis).

Leaving minor quibbles aside, *A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial* is a major contribution to the fields of critical psychology and postcolonial psychoanalysis. It is eminently lucid, informed, wise, and adept. Throughout, it proceeds with an overt critical rationale. The prose style is open, the sophisticated positions of the argument are always rendered in crystal clear terms, and great care has been taken to do justice to the detail of the thinkers with whom the author engages. This book should be essential reading for postcolonial scholars. While Apartheid is Hook's specific founding context, his wider theoretical premises and ambitions are foregrounded at all times. Indeed,

conceptual versatility and explanatory range are among this monograph's greatest strengths.