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For the 'South' and the Wretched Academics of the 'North'

DEREK HOOK (ED.), *Critical Psychology*. Lansdowne: UCT Press, 2004. 657 pp. ISBN 1-91971-388-3 (pbk).

In 1937, Horkheimer (1937/1992) conceptualized critical theory as a program that would overcome the separation of individual and society, values and research, knowledge and action. He demanded the abolition of social injustice and advocated for a political organization of society that would meet the needs of the whole community. Critical psychology, which shares many of his core ideas, has come of age: critical psychological conferences, organized by faculty and graduate students, have been held in national and international contexts; psychologists have published monographs, textbooks, edited books and even histories on critical psychology; there exist journals and encyclopedia entries on critical psychology; in addition, critical psychology has moved out of the so-called 'center' (North America and Europe) with Martín-Baró's (1994) critical theories and practices in Latin America. The latest addition to this critical endeavor, Derek Hook's edited textbook *Critical Psychology*, discusses mostly South African perspectives and realities.

Hook defines critical psychology in his introductory chapter as 'a kind of orientation towards psychological knowledge and practice' (p. 11), which evades any rigid definition. Critical psychology is an attitude that interrogates the role of power in traditional psychological theory and that understands psychology as ideological but also as a powerful form of knowledge in the context of psychological imperialism. Hook also emphasizes the importance of combining any criticisms with concrete activity. Thus, critical psychology must be based on *theoretical resources*, understood on the background of the *South African context*, and developed into specific *forms of practice*—representing the three sections of the book.

In terms of 'Theoretical Resources' (section editor Anthony Collins), South African critical psychology draws on alternative forms of knowledge such as Marxism and feminism, on thinkers such as Foucault or Vygotsky, and on a critical understanding of psychoanalysis (one chapter on psychoanalysis was written by Ian Parker, who, together with Erica Burman, is also listed as a consulting editor). More importantly, neglected thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, whose 'psychopolitics' is unknown to mainstream psychology, and Steve Biko's concept of 'Black Consciousness' are discussed. The reader is also introduced to conceptual developments within an African perspective based on 'indigenization', which involves the appropriation of theoretical frameworks in a particular culture such as South Africa as well as the acknowledgement of an African-based critical psychology. The latter involves the application of concepts such as *ubuntu*, which may be known to North Americans and Europeans from various

documentaries and movies on South Africa, but also an understanding of the role of ancestors (*inyanya*, to be more precise), the hierarchy of beings, an organic view of the universe, or the role of community and its relation to personhood.

The section on 'The South African Context' (edited by Peace Kiguwa) includes a description and discussion of feminist critical psychology in South Africa; concepts such as 'triple oppression' (oppressed in terms of class, gender, and 'race') are introduced; and challenges for feminist theory in the context of HIV/AIDS are discussed. Indeed, the HIV/AIDS problematic receives its own chapter on the background of critical health psychology. Critical community psychologists discuss, among other things, the role of rituals and the meaning of Ndebele proverbs in South Africa. In addition the history of the role of psychology in apartheid and racism is analyzed, as are the meanings of black psychology. The final section, on 'Forms of Practice' (edited by Nhlanhla Mkhize), reflects on activity theory as a potential framework for practice in developing countries, and on participatory action research, community psychology, discourse analysis, human development in underdeveloped contexts, and the meanings of liberation psychology.

The book is over 600 pages long and contains 22 chapters written by 22 authors; thus it is impossible to do justice to the breadth and wealth of its ideas, arguments and facts. It includes, using a textbook format, summaries, 'learning outcomes', boxes that summarize the main points of each chapter, and photographs from an African context that illustrate persons or concepts. Although the work is intended as a textbook in the South African context, it should be emphasized that psychologists interested in the cultural embeddedness and indigenous character of US or European psychology can learn immensely from the ideas and practices described in this book. I would not hesitate to use this textbook in either an undergraduate or graduate seminar.

The ideological character of European and American mainstream psychology can easily be demonstrated from an historical, empirical, or conceptual point of view. It could be argued that the dominance of American psychology has to do with the economic, military, and political power of the US. But the authority of American or European *critical* psychology rests on the same foundations. Thus, it is important that critical psychologists from the 'North' understand their own hidden culturecentric assumptions. Consequently, it would be naïve to think that it would be possible for an individual from the West to write a comprehensive evaluation of the South African contents of this book. Indeed, in addressing this book in the form of a dialogue in which a reader poses questions and looks for answers in the text, and the book poses questions for which the reader must provide answers, one becomes aware of one's own traditions.

The book represents a hermeneutic fusion of Western and African 'horizons' (Gadamer, 1960/1997). It is a successful hybridization of two traditions in which neither needed to be colonized. Thus, mainstream theoretical psychology in general and Western critical psychology in particular should gain from this book—and this applies to both academics and students. This returns us to the critical masterminds of Europe: Max Horkheimer is not listed in the bibliography and appears only in the context of the Frankfurt School and the concept of authoritarianism. It does not matter. Holzkamp, arguably the most significant and prolific German critical psychologist, is not referenced in this book. It does not matter. There are certain theoretical shortcuts that may be attributed to the textbook nature of the work. It does not matter. *Critical Psychology* from South Africa, which presents a wealth of information on how a transnational critical psychology should be developed, can stand on its own feet.

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