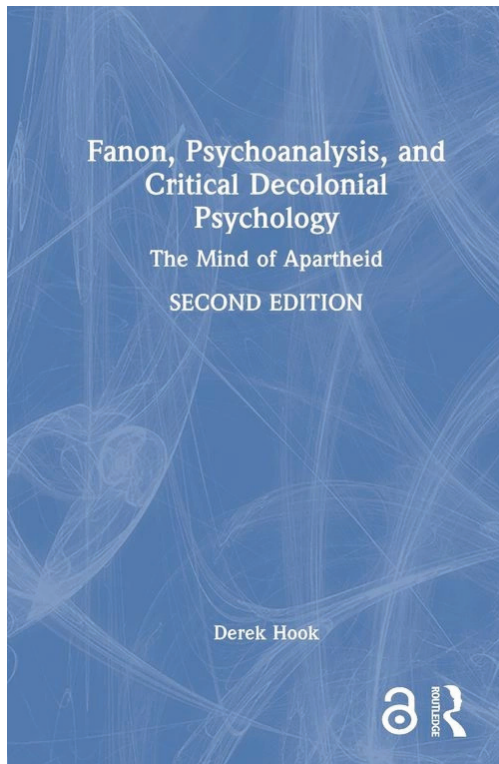


Book Review

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Fanon, psychoanalysis, and critical decolonial psychology: The mind of apartheid (second edition), by Derek Hook, Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2025, 282 pages, ISBN: 978-1-032-30801-2 (paperback), 978-1-032-30802-9 (hardback), 978-1-003-30672-6 (eBook), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003306726>

Derek Hook's *Fanon, Psychoanalysis, and Critical Decolonial Psychology: The Mind of Apartheid* (Second Edition, 2025) constitutes a substantial and timely intervention in contemporary debates within critical psychology, decolonial theory, and psychoanalytic social thought. As a thoroughly revised and expanded version of his earlier work *A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial: The Mind of Apartheid* (2012), this second edi-

tion explicitly recenters Frantz Fanon's psychology as the conceptual and political core of the project, while also responding to renewed global attention to coloniality, racism, and their enduring psychological consequences. The book does not merely revisit Fanon's ideas; rather, it demonstrates their continued analytical power for understanding how colonial domination persists in the present through embodied, affective, and unconscious forms.

The central argument of the book is that apartheid and colonialism must be understood not only as political or economic systems but also as deeply entrenched psychic formations. Hook insists that racism operates through the production of subjectivity itself, shaping how individuals experience their bodies, desires, fears, and identifications. In this respect, apartheid is conceptualized as a totalizing regime that aimed to regulate social life from birth to death, while simultaneously colonizing the inner worlds of both the oppressed and the beneficiaries of racial domination. The formal end of apartheid, Hook argues, did not dismantle these psychic infrastructures, which continue to structure post-apartheid social relations and extend beyond the South African context to inform broader patterns of racialization globally.

Positioned at the intersection of critical psychology, decolonial studies, and psychoanalysis, the book advances what Hook terms a "critical decolonial psychology." Importantly, this is not presented as a harmonious synthesis of theoretical traditions. On the contrary, Hook emphasizes the productive tensions and impasses that arise when psychoanalysis is interrogated by decolonial critique and when decolonial politics are examined through psychoanalytic concepts. This methodological stance reflects a commitment to what he describes as a psycho-political mode of analysis, one that refuses both psychological reductionism and sociological abstraction.

Frantz Fanon's work provides the conceptual backbone of the volume. Hook's engagement with Fanon foregrounds *sociogeny*, which rejects the individualization of psychological distress under colonial conditions. In Fanon's framework, psychological suffering arises from social and political structures that systematically produce alienation, inferiority, and violence. Hook mobilizes this insight to critique mainstream psychological paradigms that depoliticize racial trauma by framing it as an individual pathology detached from historical and structural conditions. In doing so, the book challenges dominant diagnostic frameworks that obscure the colonial origins of psychic distress.

A key strength of Hook's analysis lies in his insistence on the inseparability of the political and the psychic. Drawing on Fanon's notion of *epidermalization*—the process by which racism becomes inscribed at the level of the skin and embodied experience—he demonstrates how racism shapes how racialized subjects come to inhabit their own bodies and encounter the social world. This

embodied dimension of racism cannot be adequately captured by discursive or cognitive models alone, as it operates through affective intensities, visceral reactions, and unconscious fantasies. Hook's psychoanalytic orientation thus enables a more nuanced understanding of how racism is lived and reproduced at both individual and collective levels.

The book's engagement with Black Consciousness thought, particularly Steve Biko's writings, represents another major contribution. Hook situates Black Consciousness as a form of vernacular psychology that strategically mobilized psychological language to contest internalized oppression and white supremacy. Although Biko did not explicitly employ psychoanalytic terminology, Hook convincingly demonstrates that his emphasis on mental liberation, self-definition, and consciousness resonates strongly with Fanon's psycho-political project. In this sense, Black Consciousness is shown to be both a political movement and a psychological intervention aimed at reconfiguring subjectivity itself.

Crucially, Hook approaches this material with a high degree of reflexivity. He explicitly acknowledges the impasse faced by a white, apartheid-educated intellectual engaging with Black Consciousness texts, recognizing the risks of misrepresentation and appropriation. This self-critical stance strengthens the book's ethical credibility and aligns with its broader decolonial commitments. Rather than claiming authority over Black critique, Hook treats these traditions as indispensable resources that simultaneously unsettle his own positionality.

One of the most distinctive aspects of the book is its sustained argument that racism exceeds discourse. In his analysis of *abjection*, Hook examines how racism operates through bodily reactions of disgust, fear, and repulsion that cannot be reduced to language or ideology alone. These "extra-discursive" dimensions of racism, he argues, help explain its persistence and emotional intensity, even in contexts where overtly racist discourse is publicly disavowed. By foregrounding the body and affect, Hook extends Fanon's phenomenological insights into the visceral dimensions of racialization.

The newly added Chapter 4, "Desire, Fantasy, and Apartheid Ideology," significantly deepens this analysis and represents one of the most compelling additions to the second edition. Here, Hook explores how apartheid was sustained not only through coercive laws and material privilege but also through libidinal investments and unconscious enjoyment. Drawing on Fanon, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and J.M. Coetzee's literary analyses, he demonstrates that racial domination is bound up with ambivalent pleasures, fantasies of purity and contamination, and anxieties about proximity to racialized others. This focus on the libidinal economy complicates moralistic accounts of racism, revealing its affective and unconscious rewards. As Hook emphasizes:

challenging the libidinal economy of racism requires not only the solidarity of a consolidated group identity, but a marshaling of passions, the consolidation of courage, pride, and conviction; it requires, in other words, the investments that hold such an identity, such a cause, together. *Black Consciousness* reminds us that the revolutionary potential of *subjectivity itself* should not be lost if, ultimately, our goal is to bring about precisely, to use a phrase of Nigel Gibson's, a *radical mutation in consciousness* (p. 54).

This passage crystallizes Hook's broader claim that decolonial transformation cannot proceed solely at the level of discourse or institutional reform but must also engage the affective and libidinal investments through which subjects become attached to both oppression and resistance. In this sense, *Black Consciousness* is not treated merely as a political ideology, but as a psycho-political intervention aimed at reconfiguring the emotional and unconscious foundations of subjectivity itself.

Hook's discussion of temporality further enriches the book's theoretical scope. He argues that colonial power imposes Eurocentric temporal frameworks that position colonized subjects as belated, immature, or developmentally deficient. Such temporal violence has profound psychological consequences, producing experiences of lack, aspiration, and melancholia. Through psychoanalytic concepts such as repetition and melancholia, Hook shows how unresolved colonial histories return in disguised forms, haunting both individual and collective psyches. Apartheid, in this sense, is not a closed historical

episode but an ongoing psychic structure whose aftereffects continue to shape contemporary subjectivities.

As a contribution to critical psychology, the book challenges the discipline to confront its own colonial inheritances. Hook advances an immanent critique that works from within psychology's conceptual resources to expose their complicity in projects of normalization, governance, and racial ordering. Psychology, he argues, has too often functioned as a depoliticizing force, translating structural violence into individual deficit. A critical decolonial psychology must instead foreground power, history, and sociogenic causality—attending to how psychological distress is produced by social structures rather than individual pathology.

The book's engagement with multiple theoretical traditions is handled with considerable sophistication. Hook draws productively on the work of Julia Kristeva (particularly her theory of abjection), Slavoj Žižek (especially his Lacanian social theory), Chabani Manganyi (South African psychologist and anti-apartheid intellectual), and J.M. Coetzee (whose literary explorations of apartheid psychology provide crucial insights). These diverse resources are woven together not as a synthetic totality but as a constellation of critical tools that illuminate different facets of racialized subjectivity and colonial power.

At the same time, Hook is attentive to the limitations and risks of his own approach. Some readers may question whether the psychoanalytic emphasis occasionally risks overdetermining psychic explanations at the expense of material and institutional analysis. Hook anticipates this critique by repeatedly insisting that psychic processes are always socially and historically produced. Psychoanalysis, in his account, is not an alternative to political economy but a complementary lens for understanding how power secures its hold at the level of affect, fantasy, and embodiment.

The book's structure facilitates both comprehensive reading and selective engagement. Following an introduction that frames the project's decolonial stakes, the volume comprises five substantive chapters: (1) Fanon, Biko, Black Consciousness: Resources for a Critical Decolonial Psychology; (2) Abjection as a Political Factor: Racism and the 'Extra-Discursive'; (3) Fanon's Decolonial Psychoanalysis; (4) Desire, Fantasy, and Apartheid Ideology (new to this edition); and (5) The 'Real' of Racializing Embodiment. Each chapter can stand independently while contributing to the overarching argument.

In its scope, theoretical ambition, and political urgency, *Fanon, Psychoanalysis, and Critical Decolonial Psychology* stands as a significant contribution to decolonial scholarship. By centering Fanon's psychoanalytic insights and reworking them for contemporary conditions, Derek Hook provides a powerful framework for understanding the psychological afterlives of colonialism and

apartheid. The book's insistence on the inseparability of the political and the psychic makes it an essential resource for scholars of psychology, decolonial theory, and racism. The revised edition not only clarifies the conceptual coherence of Hook's project but also underscores its continued relevance in a world still structured by coloniality. As global movements for racial justice continue to challenge structural racism, Hook's work offers crucial theoretical resources for understanding both the depths of racist ideology and the possibilities for its transformation.