Editorial Comment

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Since its inception, *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* has sought to locate itself on a critical edge wherein the tools of psychoanalysis, critical theory, and social critique might be brought to bear on societal institutions to interrogate extant practices and to explore ways of imagining a more just and equitable world. Our journal provides spaces for vigorous debate and welcomes subaltern and critical perspectives and a plurality of psychoanalytic and critical ways of thinking. In recent years a marked shift to the right has been evident in global politics. This is evidenced by the election of populist leaders who espouse hard rhetoric on migration, as well as an assault on racial difference and gender variance, accompanied by an escalating populist rhetoric, strategically deployed on the internet to push back against reason, argument, science, or critically or ethically grounded thought. The white nationalist mantra “You will not replace us,” publicly chanted at a march at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville in August 2017, bespeaks an anxiety about a decline in white dominance and a fear of a pluralism that, in zero-sum thinking, signifies loss and annihilation in the face of a call for a more plural and egalitarian world.

In Vol. 25, #4, of *PCS*, Derek Hook authored an article entitled “White anxiety in (post)apartheid South Africa.” This article was published after our usual peer review process. This, and a related speech that Derek gave provoked a twitterstorm on the far right in the U.S. Coverage on Fox News website shows how a tiny excerpt from that speech by Derek was abstracted to distort and villainize his work: <https://www.foxnews.com/us/professor-white-people-committing-suicide-ethical-act>. Derek then became the subject of numerous

threatening and scurrilous tweets, and now appears on the right-wing Professor Watchlist. <https://professorwatchlist.org/professor/derekhook>. The Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association [JAPA] had a similar kerfuffle over Don Moss's article on whiteness, which received blowback in U.K. and U.S.: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9670579/Psychoanalyst-condemned-paper-branding-whiteness-malignant-parasitic-like-condition.html>. George Yancey's "Dear white America" in the New York Times has provoked similar outrage: [<https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/12/24/dear-white-america/>].

We believe that such a moment calls for response and we reproduce below a letter that we prepared on Derek's behalf. At the annual Editorial Board meeting of *PCS*, members were unanimous in supporting the publication of this letter here. We are committed to providing a space for authors to interrogate vexed and difficult matters, and, indeed, to articulate difficult knowledge. Furthermore, we hope that readers will consider using this journal as a venue where prohibitions on speech can be brought under scrutiny and where we can continue to work to create the conditions where imaginings of a more fair and just world might be debated.

Dr. Derek Hook, a distinguished and internationally recognized scholar, who uses Lacanian Psychoanalysis to study pressing social issues, is a member of our Editorial Board as well as a contributor of articles to our journal. In Vol. 25, #4, published in 2020, Dr. Hook authored an article entitled "White anxiety in (post)apartheid South Africa." This article was published after our usual peer review process. Although extrapolations can be made from the article as to the dynamics of racial anxiety in general, it should be noted that Dr. Hook focuses on the dynamics of race in Southern Africa, where he was born. Lacanian psychoanalysis, while notoriously abstract, figures prominently in our journal because it is the division of psychoanalysis that has shown the greatest promise for understanding complex social and political issues. Dr. Hook's expertise in this field of study is unparalleled. His article is a careful, nuanced argument that seeks to push beyond Robin DiAngelo's popular discussion of white fragility, and he is also careful to delineate the parameters of his argument as applying to post-apartheid South Africa.

The Twitter storm that has arisen around Dr. Hook's work refers to his citation of Terblanche Delpont's work which has challenged whiteness very provocatively in South Africa. In Dr. Hook's discussion he plays ironically with Delpont's idea of white suicide, and he indicates that Delpont's own use of the provocation has a subversive and ironic tone: it was a rhetorical gesture, an invitation to contemplate ethics, and not a literal suggestion. It is unfortunate that the Twitter Universe and other outlets have chosen to act as if Delpont were exhorting mass white suicide

in South Africa, and furthermore, by selectively quoting a tiny snippet out of context, suggesting that Dr. Hook also endorses this idea. Nothing could be further from the truth. Dr. Hook explains the dynamics of anxiety and illustrates how white anxiety is an obstacle to the kind of dialogue that leads to potential for social transformation. In fact, rather than presenting a doctrinaire or one-dimensional argument, Dr. Hook's paper embodies the best qualities we seek in our journal: it is an invitation to further dialogue, a means of inviting the question of how we might give up what we are to imagine ourselves in more plural, inclusive, and critical ways. He concludes:

This is why one might read the film as offering us an important ethical opportunity, one that unexpectedly mirrors the controversial gesture of white racial suicide suggested to me by Terblanche Delpont...It is the gesture of giving up what one is—the shedding of narcissistic investments and symbolic fantasmatic identities—that proves a necessary first step in becoming what one is not, but might become. This is the transformative potential of anxiety that clinicians work so hard to facilitate, and I think that can also be discerned –however fleetingly—in the instances of white anxiety discussed above: the potentiality that a new—and hitherto unthinkable—form of identification is being unconsciously processed and negotiated.

Dr. Hook's work exhibits his talents as a critical thinker, his humility, his ethical sensitivity, and his openness to further dialog. These are key characteristics of public intellectuals. Our journal does not seek to put forth a singular truth. We provide a space where intellectuals can develop ideas that, gradually, over time, may influence public discourse and social change. The challenge in our society is that those who yearn for their own singular truth to constitute public discourse will seek to squash any opinion that provides an invitation to critical thought or progressive social imagining. As editors in chief of *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* we stoutly resist any attempt to narrow the space for critical and progressive thought, and we absolutely stand behind Dr. Hook's work and admire his courage in putting his ideas forward to help advance the conversation about how we might achieve a more just world

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