

My Voice Matters

[BOOK REVIEW]

Jacobs, L.J. (2024). **Rocklands: On Becoming the First Generation of Black Psychologists in Post-Apartheid South Africa**. Cape Town: African Minds. 157 pages. ISBN (paper): 978-1-928502-89-0.

Apartheid created a system of violence, in which violence was not only transmitted against the state, but also within families in different forms. In the unfolding of the everyday racism that Black academics need to endure to survive and thrive in academic institutions. It is evident that the oppressor's generational transfer of racism persists, forcing Black people to resist. This is hard and exhausting labour forced upon Black bodies as part of their survival in academic spaces. Since racism and other forms of oppression continue to shape the lives of Black academics, it becomes necessary to revisit the past. Through the re-examining of the past, we can critically engage with the subtle warnings before us that the past may continue to repeat itself in the present, inevitably impacting our sense of belonging. It is through this re-examination of the past that Liezille Jacobs' book, *Rocklands: On Becoming the First Generation of Black Psychologists in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, becomes a powerful testimony of resistance and refusal.

Liezille Jacobs aptly titles it, *Rocklands*, which serves as a signifier of “*a common social identity and [that gave the author] a sense of belonging*” (Jacobs, 2024: 18). The book takes the form of an autobiobiography that is divided into two parts. Part one is the practical application of autobiobiography, which allowed Liezille to narrate personal aspects of her life and, thereafter, critically engage with her text using psychological theories. Her autobiobiography employs an ecological systems approach,

Danille Elize Arendse

Department of Psychology,
University of Pretoria.
The Harriet Tubman
Institute, York University.

danille.bester@up.ac.za
[0000-0002-8368-8749](tel:0000-0002-8368-8749)

Attribution CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

highlighting the different intersecting systems that have had an impact on her development. She additionally employs Erickson's psychosocial theory to critique its utility in South Africa and uses her development as a reference for this critique. This methodology allowed Liezille to merge the personal, political, cultural, and academic in one form. Part two is a methodological section that incorporates the theory and methodology of psychobiography.

Part one involves 14 short chapters that cover intimate aspects of Liezille Jacob's life. The first eight chapters cover her childhood and transition into university and postgraduate studies. Chapters 9 to 11 cover marriage, motherhood, her doctoral and postdoctoral experiences. Chapters 12 to 14 highlight significant challenges in her teaching career, her academic advancement to professor, and her historic promotion as the first Black Head of the Psychology Department at Rhodes University. While the content of the different chapters is diverse, it provides an immensely personal yet refreshing read on her life, the reality of displacement, the context of Apartheid, and the life of a Coloured family during Apartheid. She shows an uncommon bravery in opening her life story, her heart, her thoughts, and her intimate moments to an unknown audience.

While the chapters of the book are short, they cover significant aspects of the afterlife of Apartheid in South Africa. Liezille Jacobs pays attention to the generational trauma that penetrates Coloured communities and is inherently infused in Coloured identity. More importantly, this transgenerational trauma has informed a culture of secrecy and silencing, which Liezille Jacobs refuses through the writing of her autopsychobiography. This book grants Liezille Jacobs agency to rewrite this past in a restorative manner while serving as a reminder that even though she could not speak up in the past, she can prevent further silencing. It gives us, as readers, time to soak in the past and ponder its impacts on us in the present. It is in this refusal that I believe her book significantly contributes to unpacking the afterlife of Apartheid. Her book may serve as motivation for aspiring students, writers, or academics to engage with this afterlife and its impact on their identity and experiences in post-Apartheid South Africa.

In her book, Liezille Jacobs identifies as Black, separating herself from the legal classification imposed by the Population Registration Act of 1950 and emphasising her allegiance with Black consciousness thinking. Liezille Jacobs does, however, acknowledge her Coloured culture through her family and community traditions and games such as '*Kennetjie*'. Her book does not, however, fully engage with the complexity of Coloured identity in post-Apartheid South Africa and misses an opportunity to include the *lingua franca* of Rocklands. Since her book has a decolonial objective, this engagement would have disrupted the text and invited a decolonial voice to aspects of her narrative.

Part two is a methodology section that covers the theory of psychobiography and details how one would conduct a psychobiography, with each step of the process clearly outlined

and explained with the necessary detail. Liezille Jacobs explains the complexity of psychobiography with sufficient detail that serves to invite the reader to try the method of psychobiography themselves. Additionally, she takes the reader through her writing and research process, demonstrating her skill and knowledge as a seasoned researcher. This makes the book a noteworthy resource for academics and scholars interested in conducting a psychobiography.

The discipline of psychology in South Africa has had a tumultuous past, and while there has been significant transformation within the field of psychology, the hierarchical system governing the discipline hampers its ability to be socially beneficial to the public at times. Liezille Jacob's book summons us to expand the currently registered psychology categories in South Africa, allowing us to resist the need to narrowly confine the practice of psychology, thereby making South African psychology more inclusive. Her book challenges the discipline of psychology in South Africa to be more socially relevant and to address its unfinished business in post-Apartheid South Africa.

In conclusion, Liezille Jacobs' book is a great asset for emerging academics, scholars, and students because it not only compels the reader to wrestle with contemporary issues in South Africa but also provides the reader with an easy-to-follow guide for producing a psychobiography. Her book prompts the reader to consider the afterlife of Apartheid and the implications of Black academics thriving in a higher education system that is "rigged". More importantly, it leaves one wondering whether we are still emulating Apartheid ideals in our institutions of higher learning.

References

Jacobs, L.J. (2024). **Rocklands: On Becoming the First Generation of Black Psychologists in Post-Apartheid South Africa**. Cape Town: African Minds.