PALGRAVE STUDIES IN DECOLONISATION AND GRASSROOTS BLACK ORGANIC INTELLECTUALISM

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Decoloniality in the Grassroots and The Re-emergence of the Black Organic Intellectual

Ornette D. Clennon
Claudia Sampaio

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Series Editor
Ornette D. Clennon

This series provides open, frank and accessible discussion about decolonial issues of praxis found on the ground from those who work in various community roles and provides a nuanced academic analysis and reflection of the ideas presented in the first half of the chapter (especially useful for an academic readership). Academics will gain a closer understanding of how decolonial theory manifests in real world settings outside of academia, influencing community development. The challenge of the series is to convey the lively and diverse black intellectual activity happening in community spaces that in terms of epistemology, unwittingly continues the academic decolonial dialogue in terms of application to real world social justice issues. E Many activists have lost the connection with (or are not fully aware of) pre-1980s Black public intellectual activity around social justice, as much of it at a theoretical level now takes place in academia. There are scholar-activists who are indeed attempting to bridge this gap but the vast majority of them are university-based looking out rather than community-based looking in. This series attempts to address this balance.

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CHAPTER 1

From Manchester to Manaus, a Direct Connection

Abstract In this chapter, we will introduce the idea of what a community decolonial praxis looks like. Since working in and with communities is all about relationships and how they can be used to enrich, we have deliberately used our relationship as friends and colleagues and those of our community partners as starting points. We believe that without examining the personal and local contexts of what decoloniality means, it becomes too abstract a concept and serves very little purpose in the fight for social equality in our localised communities (Fúnez-Flores, The Curriculum Journal, 1–19, 2023).

So, our quasi-auto-ethnographical approach will radiate outwards to take in the experiences of other witnesses of the same phenomena that we personally describe. As a consequence of our starting points, our scholarship and theoretical analyses will therefore be grounded in the experiences of our communities, as we forge paths towards a liberatory decolonial praxis embodied by the Organic Black Intellectual.

Keywords Praxis • Social justice • Decolonial • Auto-ethnography • Communities • Decolonisation • Organic intellectual

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Introduction

This volume will take its cue from Bruce & Clennon's (2022) *Decolonising Public Health Through Praxis* and is very much its companion volume. In the earlier volume, a central conversation between the authors was used as an accessible format for lay readers to understand the complex issues around coloniality and its continued effect on Black communities in the UK and their health outcomes. In our volume, we will continue to use the conversation format as a discursive tool to zoom into the continued impact of imperial whiteness on our education systems and community engagement.[1]

Preamble

O: Wow! Claudia. We finally made it! We've been talking about writing a book together for years now.

C: Yes, I know, it is hard to believe that it has happened.

O: Do you remember when we first met, I think back in 2012, when you were giving your talk about your music project in a young offenders' institution and that was a little after my music project in a young offender's institution? And it was like wow—we've got to connect!

C: That was indeed the start of our journey together. I seem to remember that I was at an event in London and came up to Manchester to present my work and I had brought my student at the time, Larissa, who thought our trip to England was amazing.

O: But it wasn't until you returned to Manchester on a Visiting Research Fellowship that we really understood that we were academic "twins". Even though we were separated by thousands of miles (and really long flights), we were grappling with the same issues in our respective communities.

C: True. We called our work the "Man" communities because of the similarities between our communities and the name of our cities. I remember at the time I was engaged in a rainforest mapping project with Indigenous communities. It was about forest conservation.

[1] The earlier volume having laid the ground for the origins and development of whiteness over the longue durée.

O: Even that is wild because many moons ago as a young composer, I was part of an educational project that was protesting against the deforestation of the Amazon.[2] I wrote a string quartet called *Hidden Song* about it. It was performed in the Botanical Gardens in Edinburgh by members of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. So, many years later when I finally managed to get out to you in Manaus and to actually visit a part of the Amazonian rainforest and hear the sounds that inspired my quartet, it was a really special moment for me.

C: I remember you saying that when you were with us. It took a long time after my stay in the UK to get you over to Manaus. People still occasionally reminisce about your lecture and creative music workshops, you know. It was really special and in so many respects, inspired a few things for our programme after you left…But you did come back and work with us online, especially during the pandemic.

O: Great to hear about the workshops. But those communities in Manaus you took me to…It was so good to see the work that you and your students were doing in your localities and reminded me so much of the work I was doing over here.

C: I know. I remember the tour you took me on to meet your community partners at MEaP. It was a really sunny hot day (but only warm for me, remember I'm Brazilian), and you took me to your Media City over the water, that really reminded me of an urban beach front in Manaus by the river. It was glorious. But I also remember *our* tour of Manaus and the hysterical laughter over the Pope and a roundabout that I live nearby (although it was nearer to your hotel).

O: Yes, in the WHOLE of Brazil and on his ONLY visit to the country, he visited that ONE roundabout?

C: Hahahahaha No not exactly; there was actually a centre there (near to the roundabout).

[2] See Phillips (2023) for a report about the latest international conference in Brazil to discuss cross-border Amazonian deforestation. Also see Chap. 5 for discussion about the existential links between indigeneity, the dehumanising effect of whiteness and environmentalism.

The Work

O: OK apart from the "Man" in our cities' names (and their industrial heritages, cotton and rubber) and the excellent times we've spent in each other's cities, the similarities between our oppressed communities was depressingly close. I couldn't quite get my head around how this could be. From my perspective, it was as if our ethnic minorities in the UK were existing in the cracks/gaps of our supposed universal provision, which made them appear to be sharing a very similar experience to your Black and Indigenous communities.

C: Yes, we combined our research groups, when you were at the university, for this very reason. But I know for sure that I had to go on both a personal and professional journey to really understand the effects of the colonial project on my communities but also on myself in terms of my own identity. I will speak more about this in Chap. 2, as it has affected me deeply. Also, this thing that unites our communities is the Senzala, as a concept that used to be a place. It is Portuguese for "enslaved quarters" and is usually accompanied by "Casa Grande" meaning the Big House or I think you call it "The Master's House".

O: Very true. In Chap. 2, we do get into how understanding life on the Brazilian plantation is foundational to understanding the colonial mentality and violence of whiteness and how it treats its non-white subjects. Yes, there are differences, but at their core these colonial mentalities (and the violence) are coming from exactly the same place. This, for me, would explain why our experiences and that of our communities are so very similar.

C: I agree because your experience of teaching at universities in the UK as Black man, in Chap. 3, is also shockingly similar to mine as a Black woman and other Black colleagues that I speak to, in Chap. 4.

O: Yes, both systems of education seem to have a heavy legacy of the plantation interwoven into their existence. In Chap. 3, I call it a plantocracy. It has been so very interesting to compare the two systems. BUT for me, it really did point the way towards the need for organic Black organic intellectuals in our communities, outside of the plantation.

C: For me, too because in Chap. 3, I talk about how Black knowledge is constantly being excreted out of the university, but in Chap. 4, I talk a bit more about how in Portuguese, Blacks are associated with faeces and how this image becomes extremely violent when used in everyday speech. So yes, we need to have Black knowledge outside of these violent white spaces, where we keep getting being told we don't belong.

O: In Chap. 5, (although you kick-start the process in Chap. 4, Claudia) we do actually begin to talk a little bit about our work to create these decolonial knowledge spaces in our respective communities, but it is especially the ideas of fragmentation, Indigenous cosmologies and the multifaceted meaning of "territory" and how triple consciousness works to reintegrate all of these to counter the dehumanising coloniality of whiteness (Bruce & Clennon, 2022) that underpins our organic Black intellectual work in our communities. It also nicely unites the Indigenous and Black agendas of social justice![3]

C: Yes, we do, but as I say, it is still a challenge for me to do that as much as I would like to, still working in the Casa Grande…

O: I hear you! In Chap. 3, Claudia, I share exactly those challenges from over here, in the other "Man"!

Epilogue

Dear Readers,

We hope that you enjoy our brutally frank conversation between colleagues and friends about these issues in our communities. We also hope that the window into our combined experiences, or as W.E.B. Du Bois would describe it, the Veil (see Du Bois, 1903; Blau & Brown, 2001), will help to move the conversation on about how we continue to resist this thing we call whiteness and its terrible blight on our lives!

[3] Uniting the Latin American and African continents in solidarity in the fight for social and racial justice against the coloniality of whiteness, as decoloniality (the interrogation of the "coloniality of power") and decolonisation (re-imagining pre-colonial knowledge for the twenty-first century); two separate but related concepts used as central vehicles within triple consciousness.

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CHAPTER 2

The Discourses Around Decoloniality in the UK and Brazil

Abstract We will provide a brief overview of the decolonial discourses taking place in the UK and Brazil. We will also outline the cultural terrain of imperial Brazilian whiteness and compare it to imperial Anglophone whiteness (and that of other regional dominions), in order to show that the differences between these methods of colonial subjugation are only superficial. By demonstrating how Brazilian male-gendered whiteness is openly structured around (white) male sexual violence, we will show not only the interconnectedness of both forms of regional colonial administration, but through their use of male sexual violence, we will also remind the reader of how Brazilian whiteness can be regarded as an index to help us better understand the sexual pathology of Anglophone (and other regional dominions') male-gendered whiteness and *imperial whiteness*, more generally.

Keywords Decoloniality • Whiteness • Pardo • Racial democracy • Racial tolerance

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Introduction

As this volume is intended to be a continuation of Bruce & Clennon's (2022) exploration of whiteness as a historical pattern of behaviour and its grassroots impact, we will continue to use our personal experiences and the voices of our community partners as flash points for further decolonial discussion. This chapter will set the scene for the volume by outlining the Brazilian version of imperial whiteness, before emphasising how Brazilian (Lusophone) and Anglophone (and other regional dominions') whiteness are, in fact, exactly the same phenomenon only differentiated by celebration and denial.

The Importance of Casa Grande e Senzala in Brazil

Ornette: OK. I am aware that race and ethnicity are slightly different beasts in Brazil to ours in the UK. Can you describe the Brazilian scene for us?

Claudia: I think a good starting point to think about the landscape of race and how it manifests in Brazil is understanding that if you're Black or a non-white person, you're still considered a "minority" and will experience the feeling of not being a proper citizen. This means that race defines whether you are in or out, even if you're part of the largest racial group in your country. Let's consider our backgrounds; you and I growing up in different places. You were born and raised in the UK, a place that is majority white.

I was born in Brazil, as you know and Brazil is the country with the biggest African-descended population outside of the African continent. It's because of the massive and horrific slave trade that Portuguese colonisers developed. We have the sad heritage of being the country that took the longest to abolish the infamous practice of slavery. Brazil has 56.1% of Black or mixed races African-descended population.[1] If we include other non-white groups, such as the Indigenous inhabitants, we will find that the white population is a minority group. But if the non-white population outnumbers white population and

[1] See IBGE (2022).

has always done, how is it possible that we both have the same experience of our educational institutions?

O: Really good question. It really does make me wonder!

C: Although I was raised in Brazil, remember, in a non-white majority country, my experience is impressively close to yours in terms of similarities,[2] and this is why we have to discuss what coloniality as a process has to do with it.

OK. I'll start with one aspect that makes whiteness so evident wherever we were raised: education. I think at a certain point in colonial history, knowledge and education became exclusively for the benefit of white people. What makes this absolute in these spaces is being dark-skinned.

Brazil is known for being a racially democratic country. A work that was hugely important for consolidating the "racial democracy" myth is Roberto Freyre's, 1933, *Casa Grande e Senzala* (Big House and the Slaves).[3] In my country, there is denial of tensions arising from the clear racial divisions, where we don't speak about or even reflect on what is to be Black, mixed or Indigenous in Brazil. However, our experiences are proportionally inverse to their silence and invisibility, where the racism in the educational, academic and social context as whole thrives and screams in the most vibrant of colours and agonies!

O: So, what do these agonies actually look like?

C: I'll illustrate them with my personal story. I was born in the State of Amazonas. It is the largest state in the northwest territory and is known worldwide for the Amazon Forest, its rivers, biodiversity and an abundance of natural resources. Despite 523 years of colonial occupation by the Europeans (i.e. a violent occupation that decimated millions of Indigenous people who lived here), the State of the Amazonas still manages to have the largest Indigenous population in South America. Even though I'm fifty-four years old and for fifty-one years have been studying or working in Education, I have only been able to work and reflect on the meanings and consequences of

[2] See Clennon (2018) and Bruce & Clennon (2022) for background details about Ornette's school days that include him being a victim of his teachers' lower expectations of his academic potential.

[3] See Freyre (2003 [1933]).