

**Adele N. Norris<sup>1</sup>**

### **Interrelated Struggles and the Role of the Academic in the Fight for Freedom**

Professor Biko Agozino delivered the keynote address for the launch of the new journal *Decolonisation of Criminology and Justice* on the 7th June of this year. He began his talk recounting his earliest memories as a child survivor of the Nigerian Biafra War that occurred in 1967 to 1970. Specifically, he called attention to the critical role of intellectuals and academics, trained at top Universities, in facilitating the conflict that claimed millions of lives through bombings and starvation. Genocides of Indigenous peoples are still occurring and state-sanctioned violence (e.g., police brutality, mass imprisonment, criminal justice system, inadequate housing) is commonplace for Indigenous and Black peoples (Benson & Lewis 2019, Estes 2019, Kanem & Norris 2018, Ritchie 2017). Professor Agozino asked for us to reflect upon the place of the academy and the role of the scholar-activist in the struggles occurring all around us.

Professor Agozino implored us to respond to and shed light on the unfreedoms sophisticatedly packaged as the war on drugs and poverty, for example, by first seeing the interconnections in our struggles, which he ensured would be a challenging undertaking. Explicating this point, he posed the questions: How do we teach, challenge and decolonise when it is the government who often defines our subject matter? How do we decolonise a discipline entrenched in colonialisation? How do we begin a project of decolonisation even though we are using the English language?

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr Adele Norris is a Senior Lecturer, Sociology/ Social Policy, University of Waikato, Hamilton New Zealand.

Decolonisation is inextricably linked to freedom (Agozino 2018, Cunneen & Tauri 2017, Mar 2016, McIntosh & Workman 2017). Given this, I argue that an essential component of decolonisation involves identifying interdependent struggles in order to form coalitions of consciousness. As academics and anti-racist activists, we must engage in new ways of thinking about culturally grounded disruptive approaches to achieving racial and economic equity. Academics, therefore, must be able to engage in the daily realities of women, men and children who are murdered in large numbers such as the case of Indigenous peoples in West Papua who suffer under Indonesia's domination (Kanem & Norris 2018). Masses of Black and Brown people are imprisoned (Cunneen & Tauri 2017, McIntosh & Workman 2017, Norris & Lipsey 2018, Ritchie 2017), structurally blocked from access to adequate housing, and trapped in precariat and unstable work. All of these social ills, argues Agozino, are evidence that the colonial project has not ended in countries like Aotearoa New Zealand, Canada, the United States, and Australia, but, instead, has transformed into settler-colonialism (Agozino 2018, Cunneen & Tauri 2017, Kitossa 2012, Mar 2016, McIntosh & Workman 2017, Smith 2015).

Unequal experiences of citizenship, many scholars argue, are the hallmark of a settler-colonial state, which are becoming more difficult to prove in an era that celebrates diversity and multiculturalism (Benson & Lewis 2019, Norris 2019). Diversity claims in a settler-colonial state have substantially contributed to the erasure of oppression and extreme marginalisation subjugated groups continue to face. For example, in the United States, when Indigeneity and Blackness reached an uncomfortable visibility in part due to the social movements Dakota Access Pipeline (Estes 2019, Ritchie 2017) and Black Lives Matter (Rickford 2016, Ritchie 2017, Lindsey 2017), a fear was incited as some scholars suggest, bolstered the extreme right. It was the urgency to mute Black and Indigenous voices that led to the election of Donald Trump.

The 2016 US presidential election illuminates that racial injustice remains one of the most contentious issue in many parts of the world today. Racial tensions have only amplified since the election of Donald Trump as evidenced by the growing global threat of neo-Fascism and the White Power movement. Such threats coupled with continued state-sanctioned violence against Black and Brown people signify the importance for academics to identify precisely deliberate tactics mobilised against marginalised people (Estes 2019, Ritchie 2017, Willingham 2018). For example, in both the United States and Aotearoa New Zealand, over half of the prison population is comprised of people racialised as non-white when they represent roughly a quarter or less of the total population (Cunneen & Tauri 2017, McIntosh & Workman 2017, Norris & Lipsey 2018). The phenomenon of mass imprisonment and police brutality has trapped generations of people into an underclass, which has spurred new voices of resistance. Therefore, contemporary strategies and tools subjugated groups use to fight against and resist old and new forms of marginalisation need to be brought to the forefront of mainstream discussions from those individuals most affected (Estes 2019).

Agozino argued that now is not the time for academics to become complicit but to develop new understandings of complex strategies of resistance and emancipation across interdependent and interrelated struggles. Decolonisation of criminology and justice is not just for Indigenous people just like the fight against sexism is not only for women. Tackling poverty and class exploitation is not just for the working class in the struggle against capitalism. We all must be attentive to and acknowledge interrelated social problems for the progress of all.

In conclusion, Agozino stated that there is no such thing as a humane colonialism or post-colonialism. Academics must not make friends with the legacy of colonial criminology, which

was designed for the control of others. In a discipline like criminology, we need to be at the table for the benefit of all because white supremacy, capitalism, homophobia, and patriarchy remains a threat to all.

## References

- Agozino, B. 2018. The Withering Away of the Law: An Indigenous Perspective on the Decolonisation of the Criminal Justice System and Criminology, *Journal of Global Indigeneity*, 3(1), pp. 1-22.
- Benson, M. & Lewis, C. 2019. Brexit, British People of Colour in the EU-27 and Everyday Racism in Britain and Europe, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, pp. 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2019.1599134>
- Cunneen, C. & Tauri, J. 2017. *Indigenous Criminology*. Bristol: Policy Press University of Bristol.
- Estes, N. 2019. *Our History is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance*. Brooklyn: Verso.
- Kanem, V. & Norris, A. 2018. An Examination of the Noken and Indigenous Cultural Identity: Voices of Papuan Women, *Journal of Cultural Analysis & Social Change*, 3(1), pp. 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.20897/jcasc/86189>
- Kitossa, T. 2012. Criminology and Colonialism: Counter colonial criminology and the Canadian context, *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 4, pp. 204–226.
- Lindsey, T. 2017. Ain't Nobody Got Time for That: Anti-Black Girl Violence in the Era of #SayHerName, *Urban Education*, pp. 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085917747098>
- Mar, T. 2016. *Decolonisation and the Pacific: Indigenous Globalisation and the Ends of Empire*. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press.

- McIntosh, T. & Workman, K. 2017. Maori and Prison, In A. Deckert & R. Sarre (ds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Australian and New Zealand Criminology, Crime and Justice*, pp. 725–736. Cham (Switzerland): Palgrave Macmillan.
- Norris, A. 2019. Discussing Contemporary Racial Justice in Academic Spaces: Minimising Epistemic Exploitation while Neutralising White Fragility, in S. Ratuva (ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Ethnicity*, pp. 1-13. Gateway East, Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore Private Limited.
- Norris, A. & Lipsey, K. 2018. Public Attitudes Toward New Prisons in New Zealand and Deficit Narratives: A Quantitative Survey, *International Criminal Justice Review*, pp. 1-13.
- Rickford, R. 2016. Black Lives Matter: Toward a Modern Practice of Mass Struggle, *New Labor Forum*, 25(1), pp. 34-42.
- Ritchie, A. 2017. *Invisible No More: Police Violence Against Black Women and Women of Color*. Boston (MA): Beacon Press.
- Smith, A. 2015. *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Willingham, B. 2018. Black Women and State-sanctioned Violence: A History of Victimization and Exclusion, *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 48(1), pp. 77-94.