

Navigating Racial Landscapes



Wholeness and Wounds

AILEEN ALLEYNE



'Aileen Alleyne writes from the wound. She doesn't write about it or around it. Her insider-outsider stance is not a methodology but a way of being: the body that is simultaneously inside the therapeutic institution and beside it, reading the accommodation from within its own sedimentation. What she calls "listening in colour" is a refusal of the greyscale neutrality that modern care demands of its practitioners. And her unflinching examination of "you make me whole"—the phrase that sounds like love and operates like governance—is one of the sharpest interrogations of the thesis of completion I have encountered. This book asks what it costs to navigate landscapes that were never drawn for your body. It does so with the fierce tenderness of someone who has been paying that cost for decades and has decided, at last, to name the invoice.'

**Báyo Akómoláfé, Hubert H. Humphrey Distinguished Professor
of American Studies, Macalester College, USA;
Founder, The Emergence Network**

'Passion, politics, and justice frame this thoughtful book. Clear clinical examples enable the therapist to understand dimensions that need addressing in the consulting room and inside of their own—perhaps unrecognised—biases.'

**Susie Orbach, co-founder, Women's Therapy Centre,
London and WTCI, NYC**

'Dr Aileen Alleyne's *Navigating Racial Landscapes* offers a compelling and embodied exploration of racial experience, drawing on polyvagal theory to illuminate how our nervous systems shape connection, safety, and engagement. Extending these principles through domains shaped by her personal, clinical, and cultural experiences, she brings insight and originality to complex questions, contributing to our understanding of how biobehavioural state influences social engagement in contexts shaped by race.'

**Stephen W. Porges, PhD, Distinguished University Scientist,
Indiana University; originator of polyvagal theory**

'This brilliant book tells a deeply personal story that speaks to universal truths, written in a voice of liberation, with the heart of a poet and the mind of a highly skilled clinician. It is a must-read for all psychotherapists of Colour who want to understand the torment of racialised labour and its consequences if left unprocessed. It is also a necessary study for White psychotherapists, empowering them towards self-healing through deeper recognition of their "implicated subject" position.'

**Kirkland C. Vaughans, PhD, Senior Adjunct Professor,
Derner School of Psychology, Adelphi University;
co-editor, *The Psychology of Black Boys and Adolescence***

NAVIGATING RACIAL LANDSCAPES

Wholeness and Wounds

Aileen Alleyne



First published in 2026 by
Karnac Books Limited
62 Bucknell Road
Bicester
Oxfordshire OX26 2DS

Copyright © 2026 Aileen Alleyne

The right of Aileen Alleyne to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with §§ 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A C.I.P. for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80013-457-7 (paperback)

ISBN: 978-1-80013-470-6 (e-book)

ISBN: 978-1-80013-469-0 (PDF)

Typeset by vPrompt eServices Pvt Ltd, India



www.firingthemind.com



Kintsugi reflection

*Wholeness is not the erasure of our cracks,
but the gold that fills them.*

*In the art of Kintsugi, fracture becomes design—
a map of what has been broken, held, and healed.*

*So too, in the racial psyche,
our wounds are not marks of shame
but seams of survival, glinting with truth.*

—Aileen Alleyne

This book is a wholly human-authored work, shaped
by lived experience, clinical practice, and reflective
scholarship.

Contents

Acknowledgements	ix
About the author	xi
Preface and introduction	xiii
<i>CHAPTER 1</i>	
Post-publication blues	1
<i>CHAPTER 2</i>	
Why I'm tired of teaching White people about race	17
<i>CHAPTER 3</i>	
Woke: From political awakening to cultural battleground	37
<i>CHAPTER 4</i>	
Listening in colour	57

CHAPTER 5

“YOU make me WHOLE”—oppressive submission or liberating gratitude? (Read that again please) 85

EPILOGUE

Walking the landscape once more 119

References 123

Index 129

Acknowledgements

This book was shaped by countless conversations—some spoken aloud, others carried in the stillness between breaths, found in quiet observations and reflections. I am deeply grateful to all who entrusted me with their stories, their vulnerability, and their truths. You have been my compass navigating through these racial landscapes. I am also grateful to the publishing staff at Karnac, led by Kate Pearce, for their thoughtful stewardship, belief in this work, and commitment in bringing this book to publication.

To my ancestors, whose footsteps echo beneath my own—your resilience is the ground I walk on, the rhythm that steadies me.

To my private editors who walked with me part of the way, and to colleagues, clients, supervisees, and my clinical supervisor, who challenged and stretched my

thinking—thank you for creating the space for me to dare enter difficult and necessary places.

To my beloved family and cherished friends who reminded me to rest, to laugh, and to keep perspective—you held me with care when the work grew heavy. Your honesty and thoughtful critiques grounded me, and your presence gave me the strength I needed.

And to the unseen and often unnamed communities of resistance, creativity, and love that flourish at the margins—you're a reminder that survival alone is never enough. Joy, too, is our birthright, inheritance, practice, and the path I/we choose to follow.

About the author

Dr Aileen Alleyne is a UKCP-registered psychodynamic psychotherapist, clinical supervisor, and organisational consultant in private practice. She is a visiting lecturer at several psychotherapy training institutions and a specialist consultant on race and cultural diversity across major public-sector organisations, including the National Health Service, social services, education, and police services.

Her first book, *The Burden of Heritage: Hauntings of Generational Trauma on Black Lives* (Karnac, 2022), was nominated for the 2023 Gradiva Award and has become an invaluable teaching and research resource within the counselling and psychotherapy community.


Aileen's clinical research examines the lived experiences of Black workers across the NHS, education, and social care sectors, offering a significant contribution to understanding

racism as an enduring psychological trauma. Central to her work is the concept of *the internal oppressor*, a framework that deepens insight into the complex psychological responses to racial wounding.

She is the author of numerous book chapters and peer-reviewed papers on Black–White relational dynamics, shame and identity injury, and the challenges of diversity in organisational life. While she now engages more selectively in public speaking, she continues to shape contemporary discourse through her writing, teaching, and carefully chosen contributions to professional and academic spaces.

Preface and introduction

My roots hold one shore; my gaze spans two
Here, I belong—yet stand apart—
Reading the racial landscapes
from two vantage points
I'm at home, yet always arriving
Life shaped in affirmation
the other in negotiation.
Aileen Alleyne



This book begins in those rooms, and in the spaces beyond them, where race has been central to my professional interest, my burden, and my lived reality. *Navigating Racial Landscapes: Wholeness and Wounds* is a journey through professional encounters, private reckonings, and the interior terrains that shape both. It also traces how my position as “insider-outsider” in this dialogue has shifted: not an exit, but a reorientation; not retreat, but a reclamation of how I use my voice, my labour, and my presence in conversations about race.

Why the insider–outsider concept?

To inhabit both insider and outsider positions is to carry a dual vision: fluent in the language of the thing being scrutinised, yet always standing at its edges, noticing what others might overlook. I hold this duality not as a burden but as a gift—an ability to embrace multiple perspectives at once, much like W. E. B. Du Bois’ notion of “double consciousness”.¹ It allows me to move quietly through spaces, listening, observing, and reshaping narratives in ways that invite new possibilities rather than demanding them.

bell hooks reminds us that the margin can be a site of potential, not merely deprivation.² From this threshold, my work focuses on psychotherapy and education as practices of freedom—not just as instruction, but as opportunities for liberation. In these realms, change does not always erupt dramatically; it unfolds through consistent dialogue, through the almost invisible shifts that occur when trust and reflection are allowed to develop.

As someone involved in the fight for racial equality, I have often wondered whether my quieter, more creative approach to activism “counts”. Activism is often associated with public visibility, marches, protests, chants, and disruption. However, the rhythm of protest does not always match my temperament or stage of life. My activism takes shape through writing, psychotherapy, supervision, teaching, and everyday conversations—methods of contribution that are less visible but just as shaped by lived experience. In these spaces, my role is to facilitate and empower others

to become their own agents of change. Patricia Hill Collins notes that insider knowledge is powerful because it is rooted in daily reality.³ To speak from that truth, even subtly, is a form of resistance.

The outsider role also matters. At times, I step back, positioning myself as a “neutral” investigator of less-explored areas such as race and trauma. Occupying both insider and outsider positions offers balance: I can inhabit the space in between, contributing authentically and sustainably, while allies share some of the burdens of visibility. The insider–outsider dynamic is therefore not about who shouts the loudest, but about how each of us contributes from our own perspective.

Revisiting a question

Another reason for foregrounding the insider–outsider idea arose at the launch of my first book, *The Burden of Heritage: Hauntings of Generational Trauma on Black Lives*.⁴ I was asked whether I believed there was a difference between those born and raised in the Caribbean and those born Black in Britain when navigating racialised experiences in the UK.

Back then, I spoke about the solid Caribbean education I received, although it was heavily influenced by British culture. The school system was both an advantage and a limitation. I missed out on a fuller engagement with Caribbean history, but became well-versed in English history, its monarchs, and its imperial past—knowledge

that was critically and more accurately contextualised in the Caribbean classroom. These foundations prepared me for migration at the age of nineteen.

Reflecting further, I realise that, as a Caribbean-born Black person, my sense of self differs from that of someone born Black in Britain. Growing up in the Caribbean meant living in an environment where Blackness was normal and valued, not constantly scrutinised as a minority identity. This early experience, what Pierre Bourdieu might call a “habitus” of confidence and cultural pride,⁵ enabled me to face racism in the UK with a strong foundation of self-worth.

At the same time, Frantz Fanon describes the “white gaze” that imposes a diminished identity on Black people,⁶ and Du Bois writes of “double consciousness”—seeing oneself both through one’s own eyes and through the prejudiced eyes of others. I have experienced both, yet I also carry the memory of living outside such racialisation. This creates a distinctive insider–outsider stance: an insider in the UK’s Black community, yet an outsider because my self-concept was shaped within a predominantly Black environment. Paul Gilroy’s concept of the “Black Atlantic” captures this sense of belonging while standing apart, informed by multiple cultural landscapes.⁷ Conversely, Black Britons who develop their identities entirely within the UK racial hierarchy may feel a stronger connection to local experiences but often lack the psychological buffer of having lived where racial identity was not under constant scrutiny.