



*Wave, off coast Rozelle, St. Thomas, Jamaica* by Emma Lewis

**Cultural and Pedagogical Inquiry:  
Special Issue, Summer 2020**

**“I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings”**

***Guest Editors:***

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## Introduction: Mapping the Landscape

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For CPI's Summer 2020 Special Issue (Vol. 12, No. 1), many of the contributors explore explicitly and implicitly, key metaphors in Maya Angelou's (1993/1983) well-known poem: "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" in which she deliberately juxtaposes two sets of contrasting images. On the one hand, Angelou describes the imprisoned bird's enraged responses to being incarcerated. On the other hand, Angelou paints contrasting pictures of the freedoms experienced by the free bird that unfurls its wings, catches the air currents, and soars upwards, in order to claim the skies. In reality, the caged bird is Maya Angelou's metaphor for the oppression, exploitation and suffering of African-Americans. Very stark, disturbing reminders of the structural and systemic oppression under which African-Americans have lived for hundreds of years, are depicted in particularly graphic terms, in the video of George Floyd's murder by police in May 2020. Two recent films, namely, the controversial "Green Book" (2018) and the biographical drama "Hidden Figures" (2016), also portray examples of structural and individual discrimination and racism in the USA.<sup>1</sup>

This CPI Issue includes more than 30 works by national and international individuals whose voices, generally, resonate with Maya Angelou's (1993/1983) poem. The contributors, by incorporating significantly different voices and distinctive ways of expressing their thoughts, analyze central aspects of systemic oppression and/or freedom.

The wide range of articles, essays, personal narratives, poetry and artwork demonstrate well, the abilities of the respective authors, poets and artists to apply Angelou's key concepts to their own research and life worlds. Despite the differences in topics, conceptual and theoretical frameworks, and specific issues presented, the works for the most part move beyond exploring structural constraints to focus consistently on the types of individual and collective agency of racialized people. The stories of resistance and resiliency embrace key concepts and realities that Maya Angelou, quite often, documented in her own autobiographical series of books (e.g. only, Angelou, 2009, 2003/2002, 1997).

**The Issue's Evolution:** To date, this massive CPI Special Issue is the largest one that we have published. Several years ago, Alleson Mason wrote Cecille DePass. Mason submitted one of her articles and inquired whether CPI would consider publishing some of her work. When DePass read the article, she replied immediately, inviting Alleson to co-edit a CPI Special Issue. In accepting Cecille DePass' invitation, Alleson Mason developed the Call for Submissions (CFS). The CFS was published several times between 2018 to Fall 2019. Anticipating the possible scope of the proposed issue, DePass invited Enid Lee in Santa Cruz, and Sonia Aujla-Bhullar in Calgary, to form what grew to become a highly effective, collaborative, editorial team.

Each Co-editor invited contributions from either highly respected or emerging academics who worked in the field. Alleson Mason invited several individuals across Canada to contribute. Enid Lee consulted with Noni Mendoza-Reis in Santa Cruz and Marcela Duran in Toronto. Both are senior educators and scholars with whom Enid had worked (admittedly, in different capacities) for many years. Noni Mendoza-Reis and Marcela Duran agreed to submit thought-provoking, reflexive and reflective articles, based on their research and work. Sonia Aujla-Bhullar invited contributions from: Amrit Singh, a well-known Sikh poet & musician, a few of the University of Calgary's emerging academics, as well as a few of the presenters from the 2019 American Educational Research Association's (AERA) Annual Conference. Each Co-editor invited specific individuals whose work complemented and enhanced the directions of the proposed CPI issue.

We received, also, two excellent works from Noah Romero in New Zealand and Sarah Jane Moore in Australia. As importantly, Cecille DePass consulted with Carol Campbell, Kingston, Jamaica, and Angela Ramsay, President of the Farquharson Institute of Public Affairs, Kingston, Jamaica, who agreed to find artists who would be willing to contribute some of their artworks. Working intensively with the contributors (internationally and nationally) has been an extremely rewarding task for us because as the issue evolved, the contributors have played key roles by taking the issue into expected as well as exciting, new directions.

**The Issue's Scope and Structure:** The strength and the excellent nature of the works submitted indicated that this CPI issue has struck a major nerve. It is important that the issue also explores collective, familial and individual strategies of resistance and resiliency of immigrants from the south and racialized minorities who live in economically, developed countries in the northern hemisphere (specifically, Canada and the US), and in the southern hemisphere (namely, Australia and New Zealand). As importantly, the issue includes works from the south of a few Somali poets in a Kenyan refugee camp and several artists from the Caribbean. Quite intentionally, some of **Emma Lewis'** Jamaican photographs are placed at strategic parts of the issue. Lewis' beautiful photographs grace the issue's cover and function as inspirational, visual introductions for specific parts and sections of the issue.

For the most part, the works fall within four overarching themes: The **First Part** explores issues concerning the multiple and multilayered intersections and entanglements of identity and culture. The contributors focus on individual, collective, professional, national and transnational forms of identity. Whether presented as texts and/or poetry, the works of **Elaine Cagulada, Muna Saleh, Ghada Alatrash, Jane Sewali-Kirumira** (including photographs), **Qingyan Sun, Amrit Singh, Sonia Aujla-Bhullar, Noni Mendoza-Reis and Rosalinda Quintanar-Sarellana, Delores Mullings, Amoaba Gooden and Elaine Brown Spencer, Xiaohong Feng, and Alleson Mason**, all fall within this major theme.

The **Second Part** examines the explicit and/or implicit links between pedagogy, the curriculum, the uses and abuses of power and the impacts on life chances of racialized people. The contributors investigate different types of curriculum whether formal, non-formal, informal and lived. Articles, personal narratives, and/or poetry by **Marcela Duran et al., Areej Alshammiry, Kahmaria Pingue and Rebecca Lloyd, Towani Duchscher, Sandra Dixon, Zahra Kasamali, Noah Romero, Sarah Jane Moore, and Enid Lee**, all fall within this important group. Most of the contributions in Part Two include different types of illustrations which enhance the respective work. Several of the contributions in the First and Second Parts of the issue demonstrate superbly well, the well-known adage that as "the margins resisted and decentred the centre, they also

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transformed themselves” (Lavie and Swedenburg, 1996, p. 4). In addition to concentrating on academic articles, CPI has long wanted to publish some Action Research projects. The criteria for publication included: being community-driven which emphasized highly engaged and interactive ways of teaching and learning. Several contributions, especially in the Second Part, demonstrate such a focus.

By continuing to ride the waves of critical reflective and reflexive thinking, the **Third Part** includes articles by **Traci Cook** and **Pamela Mordecai**, a poem by **Fiona Edwards**, and some impressive artwork. Rosie Gordon Wallace, the founder of the Miami-based Diaspora Vibe Cultural Arts Incubator (DVCAI), in consultation with Carol Campbell have selected a small sample of art from the very successful exhibition “Inter/sectionality: Diaspora Art from the Creole City”. In November 2019, the exhibition, with the works of more than 20 artists, was opened at the George Washington University, Corcoran School of the Arts and Design, in Washington, D.C. I am very pleased that Rosie Gordon Wallace has contributed works by five Caribbean artists, namely, **Rosa Naday Garmendia**, **Michael Elliott**, **Asser Saint-Val**, **Kurt Nahar**, and **Aisha Tandiwe Bell**. By collaborating with **Jane McQuitty**, **Kim Huynh** (artist) has submitted an explanatory dialogue (initiated by Jane) with some of her relevant artwork. Interestingly, the contributions by Mordecai, Cook, and Edwards, the artworks from the DVCAI, Jane McQuitty and Kim Huynh, as well as many of the pieces in the first two Parts of the issue, represent counter narratives to the grand colonial narrative. Such works offer a different take on discussions and images of power. Their works support the argument that “...images regardless of whether they are true or false... are constitutive of social relations and realities” (Pieterse and Parekh, 1995, p. 5). By doing so, the contributors (in their writings, paintings and photographs) challenge dominant worldviews. Generally, the works in this issue represent perfect companion pieces to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s (2010, 2008) well-known TED talk, “the danger of a single story.”

In the **Fourth Part, Tribute**, readers will see **Timothy Reiss**’ detailed narrative that explicates the life and seminal work of “the world voice”, Kamau Brathwaite. Thanks to Pamela Mordecai for inviting Timothy Reiss to submit the comprehensive obituary and such a lovely photograph.

In retrospect, the timing for the Summer issue has been perfect. During Winter and Spring 2020, as the Covid-19 virus spread its wings of uncertainty, devastation and death across countries, in the north and south, the four Co-editors developed strong connections with the issue’s key players. The Co-editors consulted with the prospective authors, poets and artists, identified appropriate reviewers (nationally and internationally), and submitted the works to them for assessment. As importantly, the Co-editors encouraged the selected contributors to submit their camera-ready works to meet the stated deadlines.

This issue is timely, given the events in the USA and the national and international responses to George Floyd’s murder, by the police in Minneapolis, in May 2020. (See also, Rosa Naday Garmendia’s artwork, this issue). The continuing demonstrations in major cities in the USA, Canada and England, for example, demand systemic and structural changes. Only time will tell whether the gatekeepers and their functionaries will take action, to design, develop and implement effective policies, practices and procedures which ameliorate the impacts of systemic discrimination and racism. Stay tuned.

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**Endnote:**

1. The movie *Green Book* (2018) presents the African-American, Dr. Donald Shirley's concert tour of several major cities in the southern USA, in 1961. The story is told through the eyes of Dr. Shirley's Italian-American driver and bouncer, Tony Vallelonga (1950-2013). Some of the incidents of individual, institutional and structural racism that Shirley encountered in the segregated south are depicted in particularly, graphic ways. Dr. Shirley (1927-2013) was trained in Europe and became a brilliant African-American, musical prodigy and virtuoso.

The movie "Hidden Figures" (2016) focuses on the lived experiences of three African-American women, mathematicians, indeed geniuses, who challenged successfully the race, gender and professional barriers embedded in NASA's culture and in the larger society. In reality, Dorothy Vaughan, Mary Jackson, and Katherine Gobel Johnson, played instrumental roles in facilitating NASA's historical race for space. The narrative poignantly portrays, for example, the women's: strong sense of sisterhood, belief in themselves and their abilities to thrive in NASA's racist milieu, their determination to succeed, despite the over whelming structural & institutional odds, as well as, their willingness and abilities to unstintingly support each other.

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