

Running head: A Raison D'être for Making a Reggae Opera as a Pedagogical Tool for  
Psychic Emancipation in (Post)Colonial Jamaica

A Raison D'être for Making a Reggae Opera as a Pedagogical Tool for Psychic  
Emancipation in (Post)Colonial Jamaica

Deanne M. Bell

Antioch College

A Raison D'être for Making a Reggae Opera as a Pedagogical Tool for Psychic  
Emancipation in (Post)Colonial Jamaica

Abstract

Critical participatory action research is a form of community engagement and knowledge generation which, when represented semiotically, may promote social transformation. In this paper I describe a critical participatory action research project I undertook as a liberation psychologist and researcher in (post)colonial Jamaica. I summarize a narrative psychological portrait of downpressing produced by analyzing participant's relationship to state violence using a voice centered method of analysis. Denied racism and classism are found to dominate the way in which downpressors relate to others they inferiorize. I discuss the raison d'être for animating the psychology of the downpressor in a performance piece, a reggae opera. Such a piece of community art could be a pedagogical tool for psychic emancipation. Finally, I describe challenges and potentials encountered in an effort to forge an aesthetic synthesis amongst multiple pieces of conscious art.

**Keywords:** critical participatory action research, social transformation, downpressing, reggae opera, community art

### *Introduction*

Critical participatory action research is a postmodern research praxis that utilizes dialogue, researcher reflexivity and semiotic representation in order to promote transformative action in communities (Watkins & Shulman, 2008). It is an approach in which collaborative explorations between researchers and research participants generate knowledge, document social realities, make meaning and develop understandings of the studied field. Through this process, participants become co-educators potentially contributing to the development of critical consciousness (Usher, 1996).

In this paper, I explore how a critical participatory action research project I undertook as a liberation psychologist and researcher could develop semiotically into a reggae opera as a co-constructed form of knowledge and as a pedagogical tool. I describe visual artwork that instigated the research project, summarize the methodology used and outcome of the research and discuss potentials for animating research in an effort to raise consciousness and catalyze social transformation. The *raison d'être* for making a reggae opera to tell the story of denied racism and classism and its life-altering effects on the oppressed is discussed. Some of the challenges encountered in the process of beginning to make the reggae opera, including forging an artistic synthesis between already existing conscious artwork and new knowledge about race and class dynamics generated through the research process, are outlined. This paper foregrounds the production of a reggae opera as a piece of community art whose actualization could, potentially, contribute to social transformation by catalyzing psychic emancipation in its audience.

*The Effects of Coloniality in Jamaica*

In 1962, Jamaica gained political independence from Britain. British rule had been established in order to facilitate capitalist exploitation of agricultural production in the colony (Patterson, 1967). A slave society model dominated social, economic and political life on the island. Colonizers created a social hierarchy by giving more economic and political power to miscegenated natives than they did black African slaves (Henriques, 1968). Social class divisions, based on skin colour and physical features, privileging those bearing evidence of white blood, resulted in mixed race people gaining access to education, occupation, wealth, legal protection and social mobility over blacks.

In Jamaica, manumission was first given to planter's concubines and their mixed race children who inherited wealth, special privileges and rights (usually retained for whites) from their white fathers. Because there was much to be gained by being less black mulattoes dissociated from black slaves considered to be the "lowest" social group. Miscegenated elites rejected African culture creating a class distinction for creoles known as "brownings" (Shepherd, 2007).

The white bias continues in post-emancipated and (post)colonial<sup>1</sup> Jamaica. Henriques (1968) writes, "emancipation did not lead to the re-establishment of African values, but to the intensified adoption of European values" (p. 169). Despite the majority of the Jamaican population identifying as black, Henriques describes the conflicted nature of people of colour. "He is not an African with a reference point beyond and outside the world of the white man, he is a black man in Jamaica with values biased in favour of the

---

<sup>1</sup> (Post)colonial is used to problematize the term "postcolonial" in situations where the social conditions are not considered posterior to the colonial order, such as in Jamaica.

white” (p. 175). Creole culture did not develop as a synthesis of European and African cultures but, rather, as an expression of European culture and plantation society.

In the mid-1930s class conflicts intensified resulting in a labour rebellion in 1938 (Centre for Population, Community and Social Change Department of Sociology and Social Work, 2001). The post rebellion period was marked by the emergence of the trade union movement, the Rastafarian movement that expressed an anti-racist and anti-colonial philosophy, and a call for independence from Britain.

Early in the post-independent period, as a self-governing strategy and in response to underdevelopment, state institutions expanded adopting a centralist style of governance (Centre for Population, Community and Social Change Department of Sociology and Social Work, 2001). Expectations of economic and social change went unmet, political patronage displaced civil society and crime became a prevalent feature of the society. In the period between the late 1970s and early 1980s, violence escalated as political party supporters battled over scarce benefits in some urban communities. Politicians provided guns to loyal members of inner city communities known as “garrison communities.” The army and police used militant force against the black, urban poor.

In response to high levels of crime middle-class Jamaicans have increased social distancing techniques, withdrawn from broader community life and renounced prosocial values (Narcisse, 2000). Campbell (2007) argues that these social deformations are a product of intergroup racism born of the colonial experience. Campbell writes that mulattoes represent “the most pathological aspect of the racial prejudice of the society” (p. 44). Shepherd (2007) asserts that the possibility of decolonization in (post)colonial Jamaica has been stalled by the persistence of racism and its fulfillment of classism.

In (post)colonial Jamaica, oppression has violent consequences for poor black people. According to the data released by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2013) for the period 2000–2012, Jamaica had one of the highest per capita murder rates in the world. The (post)colonial nation also had one of the highest per capita lethal police shooting rates in the world. In 2007, one out of every five persons killed was killed by the police (Jamaicans for Justice & the International Human Rights Clinic of The George Washington University Law School, 2008). Every day in 2007, the police shot, injured or killed at least one Jamaican. It is predominantly the black poor who suffer this fate. Yet, despite these human rights failures, there is little public outrage. Where public discourse exists, it is often ahistoric, rarely interrogating pathologies of coloniality. In the civil sphere, probing underlying causes of deeply ingrained prejudices that continue to resist change is infrequently undertaken. Where members of civil society call for social and political remediations, the role psychological knowledge and insights can play in promoting and advancing social transformation is ignored.

One of the most emblematic human rights atrocities to occur in (post)colonial Jamaica occurred in 1992 and is described as follows:

On the evening of October 22, 1992, the police rounded up more than a hundred men and sent many of them to the Constant Spring police station lock-up; they were apparently being held only for identification and not upon any specific charge. Nineteen of them were herded into a cell eight by seven feet that had a solid door with holes drilled through as the only source of ventilation. At one point, when the men were let out of the cell for a short time, some of them refused to return; one man said that he had only one lung and could not breathe in the cell. The police forced the men back into the cell with beatings, and then did not let them out again, apparently as a form of retaliation. The men were detained in the cell for a total of 40 hours, and three of them died of asphyxiation. Those detained beat on the door and clamored to be let out, but the police did nothing. One policewoman testified that the clamor of prisoners is so common that she did not pay it enough attention to realize that there was a situation threatening to life. (Human Rights Watch, 1993, p. 3)

Human Rights Watch, the international human rights and advocacy group, issued the above report after their investigations into the atrocity in Jamaica. The report, which focused on the material conditions of prison cells, influenced public discourse. Both the international and local human rights communities called for criminal justice reform. But the broader sociohistoric context of state crime, the legacy of colonial oppression, remained unexamined.

### *Instigative Artwork*

In 1995, a contemporary Jamaican visual artist, Charles Campbell, while working on a show called *Standing Back*, in which he explored the social conditions and contradictions of Jamaica, began reading a book of abolitionist testimony about the slave trade and was struck by the similarity between descriptions of the conditions on board slave ships and the events that took place in the Constant Spring police station lock up on October 22, 1992 (personal communication, 2014). He produced the following image entitled *Lock Up*.



Figure I. Lock Up. Charles Campbell. Photo by Elizabeth Stone.

---

In this work, Campbell shows the soles of men's feet under the weight of a door as it cuts across their lives. He also illuminates the ideological contiguity between incarcerating uncharged poor black men in 1992 and slavery's Middle Passage when he historicizes the 1992 event as a recurrence of the same, a return of the oppressed. Juxtaposing iconic images of the *Brookes* slave ship (rimming the lower border of the canvas) against a neocolonial reflection Campbell guides the viewer to associate the sociopolitical values and practices of slavery to the (post)colonial period. Through these associations, his appraisal, that independent Jamaica is not a decolonized nation, becomes clear.

I own *Lock Up* and live with this image in my home. I am also an appreciator of socially conscious reggae music, including the work of Bob Marley and the Wailers. As I began to perceive the realities *Lock Up* describes I heard echoes of Marley's songs in which he depicts the social conditions produced by racism and classism from which economic exploitation and police brutality arise. In the song "Guiltiness" Marley sings of the psychospiritual curse the downpressor (Jamaican oppressor) experiences as they "eat down the small fish" (2001, p. 59). I also heard, in Marley's compelling expressionist voice the Rastafarian philosophy that for the oppressed, social transformation requires psychic revolt, which emerges in and through new consciousness (Toynbee, 2007).

My relationship to these pieces of conscious art, along with noticing the routine indifference that members of my social class (Jamaica's middle class) have toward the oppressed, compelled me to try to understand the psychology of bystander social injustice in Jamaica. I embarked on a research project to explore the psychology of the



downpressor, given the high incidence of human rights failures in Jamaica and the accompanying silence about their meaning.

“Downpressor” is a sociologically indigenous term for agents of the political economic system who dominate and exploit the downpressed. It is a term used by reggae music artist Peter Tosh in the title and body of his song *Downpressor Man* (1996) and by Bob Marley in *Guiltiness* (2001). In my work, I use “downpressor” in a narrow sense, to describe middle-class bystanders to state terror, as I believe indifference to others’ suffering constitutes a form of oppression.

In the research project I also explored how a reggae opera, when constructed as a piece of surreal art, could contribute to social transformation acting as an antidote to percepticide defined, by Diana Taylor (1997), as the destruction of the perception and understanding of atrocities.

### *Methodology*

Post-colonial theorists such as Albert Memmi and Frantz Fanon have used phenomenological accounts of intra- and interpsychic dynamics of oppression to illuminate psychosocial deformations. Fanon (1967) showed how anti-black racism is formed by a racialized social structure. In *The Colonizer and the Colonized* Memmi (1965) describes the structure of coloniality through the compilation of three narrative portraits – “the colonizer who refuses,” “the colonizer who accepts,” and “the colonized.” The portrait of the downpressor which summarizes the findings of my research could be considered a neocolonial update of Memmi’s “colonizer who refuses” portrait. Like “the colonizer who refuses” downpressors have not ceased being colonizers, rather, they

refuse to protest, have become silent against oppression thereby safeguarding their privileges.

Critically oriented research practices are aimed at exposing oppressive ideologies resulting in the development of critical consciousness (Usher, 1996). Inquiry in which both researcher and participants develop critical consciousness may be a form of social action when the process results in the creation of knowledge and new understandings about social realities. Research dialogues that inspire concrete social action are desirable outcomes of the critical participatory action research process. Critical participatory action research that instigates change may be emancipatory if, as a result of the inquiry, participants become critically self-reflexive, pursue psychic emancipation leading to the possibility of engaging in sociopolitical action that produces social transformation.

Liberative research approaches utilize dialogic discourse as a primary means through which data is gathered. Dialogue is also an invitation for ignored voices to contribute to knowledge formation and community problem solving (Watkins & Shulman, 2008). Psychological research engaging participants in democratic collaboration and dialogue, witnessing participants' experiences, listening to their reflections and insights on social realities, provokes curiosity creating learning communities. Through this process participants may also experience conscientization (Freire, 1970) and become educators as their knowledge, and the meaning of its production, is shared.

In this research project, the qualitative social science research methodology of portraiture was used given its ability to capture complex dimensions of human experience (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). Narrative portraits are shaped through

dialogue between researcher and participants generating meanings and concepts (Eisner, 2003). Meanings and themes are products of a translation process in which the researcher/portraitist articulates what they have learnt from participants in the context of their relationship to their social world.

Portraiture is a dialogic process of inquiry aimed at generating understandings of complex social dynamics signified through aesthetic means. Narrative portraitists attempt to develop composites inclusive of five foci—“context, voice, relationship, emergent themes, and aesthetic whole” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. xvii). Select themes are organized aesthetically so as to structure meaning and understanding. Thematic structuring also helps extract universal dimensions from individual circumstances and experiences.

Aesthetic compositions of research findings are produced because of art’s potential to organize complex, seemingly chaotic social dynamics (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). In this paradigm, aesthetic form is considered a necessary means through which meaning is conveyed. Documented portraits reflect back to participants an expanded vision and outsider view through which participants may increase knowledge about themselves. Participants become not only co-educators but, also, learn about themselves as a result of their participation in the project.

#### *Data Collection & Analysis*

Data was collected from in depth interviews with 11 middle class Jamaicans who are not currently human rights activists. Seven of the bystanders were female, four male. They ranged in age from 26 to 57 years old. Participants were asked open-ended

questions about their understandings of race, class, and violence in (post)colonial Jamaica and their responses to *Lock Up* and Bob Marley's music.

I used a voice-centered method of analysis to examine bystander participant-based data. The voice-centered method of analysis was developed by Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan and outlined in the *Listening Guide* (Brown & Gillian, 1982). As a feminist, interpretive system the *Listening Guide* is concerned with how marginalized voices are expressed requiring researchers who adhere to this method to listen to the multi-voice complexity of participants' psychological life as it relates to their social location. Latent levels of thought, that participants are often not aware of in their narrative, are attended to. Researchers are encouraged to listen for habituated structures of domination and oppression in participants' relational worlds. Voices of resistance against forms of social oppression are also listened for. In this way the *Listening Guide* is seen as an analytical method through which marginalized voices can contribute to the field of psychology, and beyond.

The section that follows is a composite summary of the analysis of the voice of the downpressor that emerged when listening to the 11 participant's interviews. It allows us to see the internal conflict, dissociation, disavowal and denial present in the downpressor.

#### *A Brief Portrait of the Psychology of the Downpressor*

The psychology of the downpressor is a description of the perceptual life of the bystander of social injustice in Jamaica. It includes psychological content and structures through which chronic, collective trauma is overlooked. It is a collective voice that has been individually internalized allowing middle class bystanders of social injustice to

distance themselves from ongoing atrocities. It is a way of thinking, feeling and acting—a way of being—that undercuts the prospect of developing humanistic and egalitarian social relationships. It is a voice that leaves violence and other forms of social injustice against the marginalized unquestioned and unchallenged.

Downpressing is representative of the psychology of bad faith. Bad faith is a refusal of reality, an active denial of evidence (Gordon, 1995). In bad faith, what the downpressor brings to perceptions of trauma erases the trauma, extinguishing the possibility of witnessing, producing inaction in the face of the need for social and political action. In this mode, the downpressor is caught in a hopeless act, a downward spiral of negation of reality from which there is no escape given its deeply self-corrupting character. This way of being leads to and sustains apathy and passivity. It is the antithesis of a psychology of active bystanding.

### *Racism, Denied*

Emanating from colonially produced racism and classism, downpressors, as an archetypal form of relating to the social world, support and sustain coloniality. Yet, they deny that they are racist. “I’m not colour prejudiced” says the downpressor<sup>2</sup>, but “I may be class prejudiced because I do believe that there has been a tremendous, tremendous decline in our society [resulting in] so much damage being done...a downgrading of our society” (bystander, quoted in Bell, 2011, p. 83).

Downpressors are also colorblind since they do not acknowledge that race differences matter. “The race issue is not something I see or feel... I know racism exists, but to me it’s of no importance ” (bystander, quoted in Bell, 2011, p. 85). But

---

<sup>2</sup> The downpressor’s voice is embedded within the narrative of the bystander.

downpressors feel guilty because they know that race makes a difference despite their refusal to recognize racism. They are able to turn away from the impact of racism because they do not suffer from its harm. They display a lack of empathy.

Often, downpressors are miscegenated and feel superior in class to poor black people, so they are also classist. Because they strenuously refuse to admit they are racist and classist theirs is a subtle, often nuanced, sometimes bewildering display of these prejudices.

### *Evidence, Denied*

Downpressors see the violence and injustices taking place in Jamaica but they “unclaim their experience” (Caruth, 1996). Unclaiming experience describes ways in which trauma is insufficiently perceived by the onlooker. Having seen the trauma, they renounce their perception of it. Therefore, they do not really see what is seen.

One of the ways in which downpressors actively deny evidence, unclaiming their knowledge of what is taking place, is exemplified in their response to a home video broadcast on Jamaican TV and YouTube in which an unarmed man is shot and killed by the police in July 2010, in Buckfield, St. Ann. In the video, a crowd of bystanders is seen egging on the police as they circle a downpressed man lying on the ground. From point blank range a policeman fires a single shot, killing him. Prior to the broadcast of the home video the communications arm of the Jamaican Constabulary Force issued a release stating that the police shot the man in self-defense. These events fueled a decontextualized public debate about policing practices. Despite the media attention, the downpressor expresses ignorance of the event. He responds to my description of what took place as follows:

Well, I didn't see that, but I mean that might cause me to add my voice to a petition. But then I'd have to also know; what were the circumstances that caused that? When you have that level of egging on going on, as the authority you need to be able to control yourself. You can't be just shooting, but there are circumstances that may be happening. We, we, we weren't there. We don't know what was going on. I'm not one of those Jamaicans for Justice kind of people. If there's something I can do more on a one to one with somebody that I can personally help, yeah. I'm not sure how my getting up and soap boxing really solves this problem. For me, it's more a question that you need to look at what your politicians are saying and make your statements with your vote. I don't know if me standing up... who am I? (bystander, quoted in Bell, 2011, p. 87)

When downpressors are able to recall the Buckfield incident they lament that what made it "particularly bad" was not that a defenseless man had been murdered by the state, but "that we actually saw it." Seeing the violence elicits no political action on the part of the downpressor. Neither does it instigate reflection on the act of bystanding.

When the downpressor watches TV and learns of police barbarity he says, "I can't sleep and I wake up feeling heavy and burdened the next day so I don't bother to watch it" (bystander quoted in Bell, 2011, p. 89). So they "pick up the newspaper every other day or so." Rather than facing the society in which they live downpressors withdraw into their middle class fraternity. From there, their blindness allows them to overlook the bloodshed that they do not experience firsthand. "We'll discuss things, but we discuss it in a pleasant way." In order for them not to feel "depressed" by the realities, they detach themselves from the suffering. "I rise above it and I say when I'm to know, I will know what's going on."

Downpressors know they bystand social injustice but fail to connect their participation in the political economy with collusion with systemic violence. This dissociation allows them to turn away from others' suffering. Reflecting on their response to hearing about the almost daily violence against the downpressed, the downpressor

remarks:

That is part of the problem. You read it, you hear it in the mornings and you're upset, but when you come to work meeting sales targets is paramount, and it just falls by the wayside until I hear the next one and come back to work and nobody else here seems to be talking about it. We're all busy crunching the numbers. (bystander, quoted in Bell, 2011, p. 101)

*Witnessing, Denied*

Of poverty, downpressors say:

Most of the time you see it is when you watch it on television or if you deal with it in a charitable organization. You can't empathize with it and sometimes you wonder, "How do people grow out of that system?" because their lifestyle is so distinctly different from your own. I really don't have any friends who grew up in the ghetto. Most of my friends have a very similar socioeconomic background to my own. It really hasn't touched my life directly. I can't conceive of 10 people sleeping in one room, you know. How they live is very alien to my way of life. And what I know, in Jamaica, is that that separation is still here. Those divisions are much more stark between the poor, the middle class, and onward. (bystander quoted in Bell, 2011, p. 87)

Downpressors bury their insight, their witness, so that they do not see others' pain. They disavow, ignore, self-deceive, and amputate their knowings from action. These processes allow the downpressor to construct their lives in order not to act on what they know.

Part of the suffering downpressors experience is the gap between where they are standing and what is going on. This bears a psychic cost because they are not integrating what they know, understand, or feel. They live dissociated lives. Dissociation from their own lives undermines the possibility of integrity.

On occasion, downpressors betray their willful ignorance. They understand that for the downpressed there is:

A total lack of hope. I think people, when they don't feel they have any way up or out of the situation that they live in, they turn on themselves because I find most of the violence that is occurring is gangs of people against each other, within the



same neighborhoods, within the same communities. . . . They have that sense of desperation and not knowing if you're going to have something to eat, something you can feed your child, if your child can go to school. If your husband is frustrated and he starts beating you, you take it out on your kids or on your sister. That sense of just living so close to each other and tight all the time, in the heat and no electricity and you add it up. That type of environment breeds violence. Those levels of frustration compounding. You don't have any prospect of getting work, you're not educated, and you have people trodding down on you day to day. You may work in an environment where you are subjected to discrimination or being treated disrespectfully or as a second-class citizen. If you see an opportunity to take it out on your boss, your anger spills up. That's when you have a violence, the kind of violence that takes place on the middle class. It's somebody they know. And you know, why would you rob this person? Because they've treated you like crap. (bystander quoted in Bell, 2011, p. 81)

Downpressors are not able to completely ignore the social hierarchy, disparities and resulting harm, but they do not actively engage as members of civil society in order to change these conditions.

#### *Transformation, Denied*

Downpressors have a limited view of possibilities for social transformation.

I don't think I ever had confidence in the political system so my feeling is that to the extent that I can change one life, by helping them to improve their lot in life, because they can read, and they can add, and they can subtract, I will do that. (bystander, quoted in Bell, 2011, p. 93).

Occasionally, downpressors acknowledge that radical transformation is necessary in order for the society to realize decolonization. "The real help that they need is something that transforms their way of living" (bystander, quoted in Bell, 2011, p. 95). But downpressors do not join the struggle for social transformation that would bring an end to the violence and trauma taking place.

#### *Coloniality, Affirmed*

Downpressing is a conformist ideology intent on conserving colonial traditions of oppression. Downpressors hoist their lives on the labor of others whilst severing their

empathic connection to them. They enlist themselves in a consensual social agreement not to see the suffering of others they inferiorize. Their blindness facilitates their avoidance of a raced and classed society where its structures and institutions go unquestioned, remaining intact, continuing to serve them.

Downpressors arrange their lives in order not to act on what they understand. They build a wall, cordoning themselves off from the violence the poor endure ensuring that their suffering does not disturb their peace. What they see and know yet deny taking place, is not permitted affective entry into them. Where they have placed themselves, amongst their family and the alienated middle class, is in a social location that undoes their solidarity and advocacy for collective well-being. Their attitudes, ideas, and ways of being gather as a veneer distancing them from real relationships with others. Together, these arrangements make the development of critical consciousness unattainable.

Downpressing is that part of the bystander that perpetuates oppression toward others. It is an act and a way of thinking about others. Its ramifications include not only how downpressors interact with others but, also, grave conditions under which others are forced to live their lives.

#### *Turning the Downpressor Inside Out*

Writing about holocaust testimony, Shoshana Felman observes that “from within the inside is unintelligible, it is not present to itself” (1992, p. 231). This idea sheds light on why downpressors are unconscious of themselves. They claim they do not really see because they are unaware of who is looking out at the world. I want to turn the downpressor inside out, to make visible the racist, classist and self-deceptive experience residing within the middle class bystander of social injustice. I imagine doing this by

sharing the voice of the downpressor, that has been extracted from bystander narratives shaped into the psychological portrait of the downpressor, alongside *Lock Up* and conscious reggae music, in a performance piece.

Performance-based social scientist, Norman Denzin (1996) argues that research recast as performance text can reveal denied realities to audiences outside of the academy. As spoken word, performance texts are conversive acts, speaking not about or for the other, but, rather, with and to each other. As political accomplishments, they interrogate, empower and are able to lead spectators into problematic social spaces marked by ignorance. They are “narratives that ennoble human experience and performances that facilitate civic transformation in the public and private spheres” (p. 122). They are forms of “performing that opens new ways of presenting the plural self” (p. 115). Performance texts account for the meaning of lived experience and are capable of producing “a sudden awakening on the part of the viewer, who as audience member is also a performer” (p. 115). Audiences come to understand the performance through their experience of interpreting and witnessing the performed text.

The reggae opera is envisioned as a performance piece which itself witnesses the act of downpressing. The aim of the work is to enlarge collective consciousness making explicit the role and effects of downpressing in Jamaica’s violent reality.

#### *Going Into the Interior Differently*

Instances of new consciousness are seen coming forward in downpressors when they engage, dialogically and analytically, with socially conscious, surrealist art. Surrealist art from the global south critiques colonial ideology and is aimed at transforming the world through radical movements in consciousness (Nadeau, 1989).

Richardson (1996) argues that Caribbean surrealists create images in order to explore the nature of oppressive reality and diminished perceptions of the world. Such images arise through states of mind in which imaginative, oppositional encounters to repression are semiotically expressed, producing breakthroughs in consciousness. Kelly (2002) observes that the black, surreal imagination liberates ways of thinking capable of abolishing colonial ideology and creating decolonized societies through the power of fantasy.

While engaged in participatory research I asked middle class bystanders about their response to *Lock Up* and the effect Bob Marley's music has on them. Some of their responses suggest the development of new consciousness, through a voice that acts back against downpressing. Within the bystander is a capacity for critical analysis which holds the possibility for the downpressor to reorient his psychological life. In and through moments of "psychic revolt" a process of self-questioning, of critical reflexivity (Kristeva, 2002) the bystander may act back against downpressing.

The participants I dialogued with in the research project had previously heard Bob Marley's music and could readily imagine *Lock Up*. But they had not questioned their subjectivity in relation to the realities the music and image spoke to. While interviewing participants I engaged them in a critically reflective process utilizing memory and interpretation of the meaning of the artistic images. This practice challenged downpressor understanding, catalyzing new consciousness. It is a form of *conocimiento*, a process in which new consciousness is achieved by breaking out of the "mental and emotional prison and the range of perception" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 542).

In this mode of critical perception, a bystander, reflecting on *Lock Up*, acknowledged, "So the inner city in general is like a slave ship. What happened in that

cell then, and what happened in the Middle Passage, and what happened yesterday, is the same thing. We're not much further than the Middle Passage...nothing has changed really" (quoted in Bell, 2001, p. 136). He self-reflected on the movement of his consciousness, "When we first began discussing it I said it was bullshit, but the truth of the matter is, the more you think about it and look at it, there's lots of merit in that statement."

When bystanders reflect on the meaning of Marley's music in this way they observe, "When [Marley] sings about emancipation from mental slavery you see how, in your mind, you're still locked into certain ways" (bystander, quoted in Bell, 2011, p. 138). *Lock Up*, they concluded, instigates "self-consciousness." Marley's "music causes you to reflect."

#### *Synthesizing Knowledge, Sharing Understanding*

In situations of oppression, where social realities are denied, much is to be gained through conversations between people held apart by social class structures. In this context, I explored the creation of a reggae opera as a way in which downpressor passivity toward state terror, denial, its effects and possibilities for social transformation could be depicted. Such a performance text could animate the failure to witness others because of colonially produced racism and classism. It would also be an attempt to speak the psychology of the downpressor out loud. In the reggae opera, I imagine the voice of the downpressed (expressed in reggae music) in dynamic dialogue with the voice of the downpressor. By bringing into relationship voices that are habitually kept out of contact the reggae opera would perform dialogue that rarely occurs.

Reggae is a Jamaican music genre with a race consciousness message achieving global influence in the struggle against racism (Campbell, 1985). Bob Marley's reggae music raises consciousness of many social concerns including racism and classism in the (post)colonial world. Campbell observes that, "...such is the power of art that Bob Marley's music has done more to popularize the real issues of the African liberation movement than several decades of backbreaking work of Pan-Africanist and international revolutionaries" (p. 145). Marley's music embodies critical consciousness providing a vision of radical social transformation which, when juxtaposed against the act of downpressing, could instigate recognition of the oppressive world the bystander contributes to.

In the reggae opera, I also imagine mounting *Lock Up*. Apprehending its meaning may rupture consciousness in audience members through its ability to historicize and contextualize the relationship between the downpressor and the downpressed. Perceptual psychologist Rudolph Arnheim (1997) argues that "visual thinking" is a way to understand conditions through unification of the senses reconciling perception and thought. Images, Arnheim suggests, are a mechanism for generating consciousness.

Forging a synthesis between the consciousness embodied in the voice of the downpressor, *Lock Up* and Marley's music could, potentially, create an opportunity for bystanders to begin to recognize and understand how their way of being is implicated in the atrocities taking place, thereby catalyzing psychic revolt leading to social transformation. Combining the sound of denied racism and classism with socially consciousness art whose subject includes these themes could make visible the psychosocial reality of the downpressor's existence.

While I have permission from research participants to use their voice in aesthetic products whose aim is educational, and while Charles Campbell may continue to give permission for *Lock Up's* image to be used in service of this work, the Marley estate has not replied to requests for his music to be used free of charge or at a non-commercial rate in a non-profit, educational project. Ironically, Marley's project, utilizing reggae to promote mental emancipation, is available for entertainment purposes, as part of the political economy, but is financially out of reach and therefore inaccessible for use in projects whose imperative is educational and for the purpose of catalyzing social transformation. Alternative reggae music artists have been considered for this project, yet none have a voice as closely associated with the struggle against downpression as Marley's.

### *Conclusion*

Promoting transformative action in communities where repression exists through use of dynamic dialogues between research participant's voices and relevant artwork can be challenging. Educators may not have access to adequate resources allowing them to purchase copyrights for commercially successful art, considered symbolically appropriate for emancipatory projects. Yet, artistic images that narrate the culture from which they spring can continue to increase consciousness thereby contributing to the unfinished work of liberation, when juxtaposed against representations of oppression.

## References

- Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands – La Frontera: The new mestizo*. California: Aunt Lute.
- Arnheim, R. (1997). *Visual thinking*. Los Angeles: University of California.
- Bell, D. (2011). *Ode to the Downpressor” A psychological portrait of racism, classism, and denial in (post)colonial Jamaica*. UMI Dissertations Publishing.
- Campbell, H. (2007). *Rasta and resistance: From Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney*. London: Hansib.
- Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative, and history*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University.
- Denzin, N (1996). *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic practices for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. California: Sage Publications.
- Eisner, E. (2003). On the art and science of qualitative research in psychology. In P. Camic, J. Rhodes & L. Yardley, (Eds.), *Qualitative Research in Psychology: Expanding Perspectives in Methodology and Design* (p. 17-29). Washington, DC: American Psychology Association.
- Fanon, F. (1967). *Black skins, white masks*. In R. Philcox (Trans.). New York: Grove.
- Felman, S (1992). The return of the voice: Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah*. In S. Felman & D. Laub (Eds.), *Testimony: Crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history*. New York: Routledge.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum International.
- Gordon, L. R. (1995). *Bad faith and antiblack racism*. Atlantic Highland, NJ: Humanities Press International.
- Human rights in Jamaica: Death penalty, prison conditions and police violence. Human Rights Watch. (1993). *News from American Watch*, 5(3), 1-16.
- Kelley, R. (2002). *Freedom dreams: The black radical imagination*. Boston, MA: Beacon.
- Killing impunity: Fatal police shootings and extrajudicial executions in Jamaica: 2005-2007. *Jamaicans for Justice and the International Human Rights Clinic of The*



- George Washington University Law School. (2008). Retrieved from <http://www.jamaicansforjustice.org>.
- Kristeva, J. (2002). *Revolt, she said*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).
- Lawrence-Lightfoot, S., & Hoffmann Davis, J. (1997). *The art and science of portraiture*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Marley, B. (1977b). Guiltiness. On *Exodus* [CD]. Kingston, Jamaica: Tuff Gong Studios.
- Memmi, A. (1965). *The colonizer and the colonized*. Boston, MA: Beacon.
- Ménil, R. (1996). Introduction to the Marvelous (K. Fijalkowski & M. Richardson, Trans.). In M. Richardson (Eds.), *Refusal of the shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean*. (pp. 89-95). London: Verso.
- Nadeau, M. (1989). *The history of surrealism*. Boston, MA: Belknap.
- Narcisse, C. (2000). Social integration and disintegration: The Caribbean experience. In Hall, K. & Benn, D. (Eds.), *Contending with destiny: The Caribbean in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. (p. 204-236). Kingston, Jamaica: IRP.
- Patterson, O. (1967). *The sociology of slavery: An analysis of the origins, development and structure of negro slave society in Jamaica*. London, Associated University.
- Richardson, M. (1996). Introduction (K. Fijalkowski & M. Richardson, Trans.). In M. Richardson (Eds.), *Refusal of the shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean*, (pp. 1-33). London: Verso.
- Shepherd, V. (2007). *I want to disturb my neighbour: Lectures on slavery, emancipation and postcolonial Jamaica*. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle.
- Taylor, D. (1997). *Disappearing acts: Spectacles of gender and nationalism in Argentina's dirty war*. Durham, NC: Duke University.
- They cry 'respect'!: Urban violence and poverty in Jamaica. (2001). Centre for Population, Community and Social Change Department of Sociology and Social Work. Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies.
- Tosh, P. (1996). Downpressor Man. On *The best of Peter Tosh* [CD]. London: EMI.
- Toynbee, J. (2007). *Bob Marley: Herald of a postcolonial world?* London: Polity.
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Global Study on Homicide 2013: Trends, Contexts, Data* (Vienna, United Nations, 2013) available from

[http://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014\\_GLOBAL\\_HOMICIDE\\_BOOK\\_web.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014_GLOBAL_HOMICIDE_BOOK_web.pdf)

Usher, R. (1996). A critique of the neglected epistemological assumptions of educational research. In D. Scott & R. Usher (Eds.), *Understanding educational research* (p. 9-32). London: Routledge.

Watkins, M., & Shulman, H. (2008). *Toward psychologies of liberation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.