

# EDITORIAL

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## **New Scholars, New Scholarship**

We must have the cultural confidence to develop technologies of our own kind on a timeline that plays to our strengths and which captures the imagination of our own people. We must become a developer of ideas and technologies that allow us to overcome everyday disadvantages ... and our very difficult history of slavery and colonialism. (Mottley, 2020, 11:39)

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley's inaugural remarks for the Inter-American Development Bank's Pivot Event, calls on Caribbean people to draw on the cultural confidence and creative imagination which has marked our resilience. As the older independent Caribbean states approach 60 years in this postcolonial era, Mottley (2020) urges that "it is only when we increase our cultural confidence and thus maximize the power of our creative imagination that we will be able to ... unlock our region's true potential" (13:38). This volume of the *Caribbean Journal of Social Work*, themed New Scholars New Scholarship, highlights the work of regional educators and practitioners who have qualified in social work at either the Masters or Doctoral level in the past decade. An urgency for cultural relevance in the applicability of social work practice and policy interventions is echoed throughout this volume. The authors featured reflect scholar-activist, practitioner, and policy approaches seeking to unlock our potential for competently addressing social work problems in a culturally situated manner. The offerings included are demonstrative of a commitment to confronting, grappling with and envisaging ways in which social work practice can be responsive to social conditions. The authors draw on the distinctiveness of the Caribbean ethos, disrupting the colonial gaze, questioning taken for granted global assumptions and ultimately advocating for home grown lenses, and tools with which to address our social problems.

Akilah Riley-Richardson and Clementia Eugene et al. draw our attention to the need for the design and implementation of our interventions to be germane to our practice settings. Riley-Richardson, using interpretive phenomenological analysis, examines the perceptions of frontline social workers and the relevance of social work principles. Scrutinising the universalizing tendency of social work theory, the article foregrounds how frontline social workers grapple with the scepticism with which clients often perceive interventions as foreign and irrelevant to their experience of the

world – i.e., as “white people ting.” Eugene et al., on the other hand, use a series of case studies to explore the correlates between child maltreatment and the Human Capability Approach, which is globally accepted as a gold standard for normative and evaluative frameworks. The article maps human capabilities deprivations in children who experience maltreatment in the Dutch Caribbean as well as discusses the implications for social work education. Eugene et al. urge that regional service provision must cease its dependence upon Euro-American standards to measure and rank Caribbean children’s wellbeing and quality of life. Instead, Eugene et al. concludes that Caribbean Child Friendliness Indexes designed to meet our own regional measurements rather than tools that pay cursory attention to our culture and contexts, should be a rule rather than an exception.

Attitudes and practices towards managing children is an area where the legacy of colonialism is pronounced. Emerging during the post emancipation period from charitable work through to its professionalisation, social work in the Caribbean has an established history serving vulnerable children in residential care facilities. Rosanna Joseph-Cardines and Khadijah Williams discuss their research that examine specific aspects of service provision in residential settings in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. Both authors describe environments marked by opaque regulations and varying standards of care. Joseph-Cardines examines clinical processes used in Places of Safety in Jamaica to assess cases, make referrals, and improve residents’ critical behavioural issues. In this article, the often overlooked role of the social worker as part of the multidisciplinary team of providers is highlighted. The need for standards of care is echoed in Williams’ contribution, however conducting an ethnographic study, the focus is shifted from the perspectives of service providers to those of the children and young people in these settings. Prioritizing the perspectives of young people, Williams examines how paternalism is operationalised to disempower young people and moreover, how they navigate formal hierarchies to demonstrate agency and autonomy. Urging culturally relevant practice related to children in residential care, Williams challenges social workers to decolonise their thinking and approaches to service.

The vulnerabilities experienced by our clients are often an area for reflection and research, however less attention is characteristically given to the vulnerabilities faced by social work practitioners, including but not limited to vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue and burnout. Arna Elliott-Rattray explores these costs associated with caring in a conceptual paper that also examines traumatic growth and other beneficial elements experienced when social workers “walk in sacred and challenging spaces with clients’ trauma.” While often taking the lead in direct service provision across the social sector, practitioner perspectives are often absent across administrative and leadership levels. In response to this contrast, Shauna Porter reports on a qualitative study designed to engage social workers serving people who are homeless in Kingston, Jamaica, in a critical appraisal of state sponsored homelessness services. Porter shares insights from service providers that question the relevance of services to the lived experiences of homeless individuals and its correlation with organisational leadership, strategic decision-making, and service sector fragmentation. A range of policy and legislation measures to prevent oppressive and undignified practices that marginalised the homeless are offered. The call in this volume for social work interventions to embrace an inventive stance grounded in the experience of frontline service providers is undeniable, and the contributions that follow explore innovative means in which to do so.

This volume features a reprint of Jamaican poet, writer and visual artist, Yashika Graham's (2019) short story entitled "Birdie" with a commentary by Sandra Latibeaudiere. Cultural theorist Rex Nettleford surmises that, "The arts, mediated as they are by social reality, can offer persons in multicultural situations the opportunity for self-definition and action. For the arts are a form of action" (Nettleford & Hall, 2006, p. 8). The arts as a form of action is evident in both Graham's work and the article by Shawna-Kae Burns that follows. Graham, with the alacrity and honesty that only art can deliver, draws the reader into an embodied experience of a quick witted Ms Birdie making her way through the lived experience of being confined both to a nursing home, and to the limited mindset of care providers. Latibeaudiere's commentary calls social workers to action, urging a focus on building partnerships, inclusion and social justice as core principles to guide their work with older people. Building on the notion of the arts as a form of action, Burns' offers a reflection on her work as both a theatre arts practitioner, and a social work practitioner. Discussing the use of social action theatre for social change, this article highlights the seminal work of grassroots theatre companies in Jamaica as well as the use of drama and theatre in social work education. Burns' reflection on the synergies of both forms of practice resonates with Nettleford's assertion about the opportunities which art presents for both self-definition and action.

Participatory action research (PAR), is a research approach marked by its call for action and its commitment to disrupt oppressive practices that constrain people as well as research. Cheryl-Ann Boodram's article offers an autoethnographic analysis of her field notes produced while undertaking PAR for her doctoral work with deported men in Trinidad and Tobago. While exploring the multiple dynamics involved in partnering with marginalized groups, Boodram advocates for the use of PAR for social work doctoral research citing its potential to facilitate transformation. The argument is forwarded with a balanced look at a range of potential challenges for students including managing conflict and the politics of access to marginalised populations and negotiating institutional expectations. Conducting PAR studies can be laden with anxieties and uncertainties however, Tracie Rogers offers that at every iterative research cycle there are possibilities for unexpected learning and growth. Rogers discusses the synergies between PAR and social work practice, both of which are marked by collaborative engagement with disenfranchised populations. Drawing on two PAR studies, Rogers argues for PAR social work research as social work practice, presenting the social work researcher as engaged in a change process intervening across the micro / macro divide to gather data and translate knowledge into action.

This volume concludes fittingly with Lynne Healy's review of Orlando Patterson's *The Confounding Island: Jamaica and the Postcolonial Predicament*. Healy forwards that as Patterson's potent analysis pulls apart the strands woven together to create post-colonial Jamaica, it becomes clear that "disentangling the threads is complicated." Healy reflects on how Patterson's analyses are of particular interest to social work practitioners and educators. There is much for social workers to learn from mapping the causes and consequences of the social conditions faced by Caribbean people. According to Patterson, for Jamaica it necessitates unravelling their crises and successes, from its attainment of the most Olympic medals per capita and the global reach of its music, to the unprecedented violence, (which he connects to the legacy of enslavement) to persistent failures of social policy and programmes to treat with poverty alleviation and improved living conditions as well as homophobia and gender-based violence.

Conjuring images of George Headly, CLR James, Kincaid, Sir Arthur Lewis, Brian Lara, Derek Walcott, Shirley Chisolm and Usain Bolt, to name a few, Mottley (2020) asserts, as only a Caribbean Head of State can,

We are a region that has already solved some of the most difficult of the so-called developed world's problems ... We are a place of critical creative thinkers, we like to abuse one another and we like to use colourful language, we are revolutionaries in our own ways, we are inventors, artists and pioneers, we have already produced the best and we have already been the first. (9:36)

We are indeed living in a confounding reality in the region and throughout the diaspora; a reality intricately connected to the entanglement of our colonial past, seeped in histories of disempowerment and disenfranchisement that continue to shape our relationships on micro and macro levels. This volume features the voices of social work practitioners, educators and researchers who are working towards creating innovative and novel ways to address our perplexing reality - New Scholars New Scholarship recognises the work produced by some of our emerging critical social work thinkers.

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### References

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