Home is an uneasy place: Afroperipheralism and diasporic sensibilities in Wayde Compton's "The Instrument"

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RESUMEN

El hogar es un lugar incómodo: afroperifericismo y sensibilidades diaspóricas en "El Instrumento" de Wayde Compton

Desde el siglo pasado, el discurso afroamericano ha sido hegemónico en los estudios culturales negros, ignorando en muchos casos la aportación de otros núcleos de población negra y la importancia de los flujos transnacionales en el desarrollo de las distintas culturas e identidades negras. El caso de la frontera porosa entre USA y Canadá resulta paradigmático. Frente a los enfoques nativistas y diaspóricos que han tenido un impacto decisivo en la teorización de los diversos Canadás negros, el estudio del llamado Afroperiferalismo en la literatura de la comunidad negra de Vancouver, profundamente invisibilizada por la narración oficial nacional, puede aportar nuevos puntos de vista en la formación de identidad racial más fluida y transnacional, pero enraizada en la comunidad.

Palabras Clave: LITERATURA NEGRA, VANCOUVER, TRANSNACIONAL, CULTURA, IDENTIDAD.

ABSTRACT

Home is an uneasy place: Afroperipheralism and diasporic sensibilities in Wayde Compton's "The Instrument"

Since the last century, African American discourse has been hegemonic in Black Cultural Studies, in many cases ignoring the contributions of other Black geographies and the importance of the transnational flows of population in the development of different Black cultures and identities. The case of the porous border between the USA and Canada is paradigmatic. After the nativist and diasporic approaches, which have been the cornerstone in the theorization of the multiple Black Canadas, the study of Afroperipheralism in the literature of Black Vancouver, a community deeply invisibilized by the official national narrative, it can provide a new approach to racial identity formation, more fluid and transnational but still rooted in the local community.

Keywords: BLACK LITERATURE, VANCOUVER, TRANSNATIONAL, CULTURE, IDENTITY.

"Our difficult object: black performance culture and its social and political forms is a profane practice. It has been propagated by unpredictable means in non-linear patterns. Promiscuity is the key principle of its continuance."

Paul Gilroy

Introduction

This essay stems from the recent reading of an article published by Yara Simón in *Remezcla,* an online project among writers and creatives in the USA to share stories about Latin culture, music and events that the traditional Latin media was not covering. That article, *"This Is the Only Graphic You Need to Understand How Deep Latin America's African Roots Are",* deals with the increasing number of Black identification in Latin American nations in the recent years, as shown by recent census in Brasil and Mexico. This rise of visibility of Afro-Latinos and Latin Americans of African descent comes after Henry Louis Gates Jr. visited Latin America in 2011 to learn more about racial dynamics and African history there. What he found was a great diversity of attitudes towards race from people who described their Blackness in different ways than in the US African American discourse.

The article goes on to demonstrate the deep roots of African presence in Latin America since the days of the Middle Passage, showing the account of ships carrying slaves for trade from Africa to the Western Hemisphere. The conclusion was clear: even though the USA is usually the focus of the American slave trade, Latin America received twenty-five times the number of slaves that the USA did.

Despite Black British cultural theorist Paul Gilroy's efforts in his ground-breaking *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* to create a diasporic sensibility in the study of Black cultures and identities, the African American discourse on Blackness appears to remain hegemonic worldwide mainly due to the dominance of the USA as a key producer and disseminator of culture. I share the idea of what Gilroy (1993) calls the critical space/time cartography of the diaspora. The dynamics of dispersal and local autonomy can be shown alongside the unseen detours and circuits which mark the new journeys and arrivals that, in turn, release new political and cultural possibilities.

While Gilroy disrupted contemporary focus on cultural nationalism and offers a space of transnational cultural construction, we can still appreciate the dominance of the USA, Great Britain and the Caribbean. No room is left for the important role of Canada in mapping

the roots and routes of Black presence in North America. As George Elliott Clarke, current Canadian Parliamentary Poet Laureate would say, must all Blackness be American?

With this essay I am not trying to deliver an extensive nor definitive account on Black Canadas. I am truly aware of the complex interactions between different ideas of Blackness in Canada and "Canadianness". I bear in mind the multiple Blacknesses in Canada and the heterogeneous, diverse and sometimes divergent poly-consciousness of Black Canadas. It is utterly impossible to write the complete history of any cultural group.

What I do intent to offer is a connection between the blooming Black literary scene from Vancouver, British Columbia -although there has been an established tradition of Black writers that have been obscured until the last decades-, and the different approaches to Black cultural production in Canada that have dominated the debate on Blackness in Canada in the last decades. To achieve this goal, I will offer a critical analysis of "The Instrument", a short story written by the poet and scholar Wayde Compton and set in Vancouver.

Development

Black presence in Canada has been studied in cities like Toronto or Halifax, dating that presence back to the Black Loyalists, transported to Nova Scotia from New York between 1776 and 1785, and also escaped slaves from the South using the Underground Railroad in the nineteenth century. But Vancouver does not have a tradition of sites of slavery or large communities of African descent inscribed in the national narrative. On the other hand, there has been a Black community related to the Canada-USA border crossing during the Fraser Canyon Gold Rush in 1857, as well as several crossings both ways since then. This presence has been largely invisibilized by the great flux of Asian and Pacific migration reaching Canada through British Columbia.

Until the last years, the most fertile studies on Blackness in Canada had been those of George Elliott Clarke, focused on the area of Halifax in Nova Scotia, and the diasporic point of view of Toronto-based critic Rinaldo Walcott. With his critical theory and literary practice, Clarke gave life to the nearly invisible community of Canadians of African descent in Nova Scotia, claiming Canadian roots and belonging for them. His work is of capital importance to establish a clear and lasting Black presence in Canada, separated from the dominant African American discourse. It allows a genealogical study of the presence and cultural production for Black/Canadian Studies. It provides a geographic Black presence in Canada mirroring the pioneers'. On the other hand, Clarke's project does not quite achieve the desired result, dealing with the founding narrative of a nation that cannot imagine a Black body as a part of it. Besides, his polarization of an old, authentic, rural Black presence versus a new, recent, urban Black one does not favor a much needed communication among Black Canadas. A communication that should be established among those old communities from the American Civil War era and the most recent migrations from the Caribbean and Continental Africa, a message that would show that Blackness is not a recent feature of Canada.

It is now when the diasporic, transnational point of view of Rinaldo Walcott (2003) proves useful, by subverting the modern concept of nation-state that denies Blackness as an integral part of it. It is a discourse of the nation and beyond, a connectedness, exchanges and circulation of cultural forms and artifacts as at least one avenue through which people live their lives whether in rural or urban areas. This transnational perspective can be used to trace the numerous border-crossings in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that contributed not only to the creation of Black communities and cultural produc-

tions in Canada, but also to the Abolition in the USA. Key figures like Martin Delany or Mary Ann Shadd Cary, now claimed by the African American discourse, worked hard for social justice both in the USA and in Canada, defying the very concept of nation. It is sad that their work was in most part forgotten or ignored by the Canadian founding narrative, who would not assimilate their work while *Roughing it in the Bush* became part of the literary canon. A diasporic sensibility could construct rhizomatic identities, a fluid citizenship and use the nation to claim social justice, rebuild the nation overthrowing its limitations and its narrative of containment and exclusion.

Writers like Wayde Compton or Esi Edugyan write from a position of in-betweenness, grounded in the land but not in the national imaginary and with their existence conditioned by the myth of the *"two founding peoples"* and the official multiculturalism. They write from the simultaneity of being there and not being there.

From this idea stems Compton's writing style, both a poet and a historian, beginning with Black history in British Columbia as itself the point of departure in his work, and seeking self-awareness through an examination of the ancestors and the Black author's relationship to them. He coined the term Afroperipheralism to describe the fluid identity of Black British Columbia: the result of the shifting patterns of migration and the absence of a sharply defined regional tradition. It represents a contestation to a model Blackness: the hegemonic and widely spread Black cultural products of Africa, the Caribbean and Black American, who often see their Canadian counterparts as a lesser version of themselves, they did not represent the experience of the Vancouverite Black community. Still, most Black Vancouverites, as well as other Black Canadians, grew up knowing more about Black culture from elsewhere than about the Black cultural legacy of their own provinces and communities. Black British Columbia does not locate their roots in an easily discernable common origin, nor has it ceased to shift and transform. It is the talent for reinvention and pioneering new versions of traditional identities that these conditions demand what defines Black Vancouver. Writing and asserting their existence outside the dominant African American and Pan-African discourse allows for radical identity experiments. Compton, as many Black B.C. writers, had to deal with this sense of traditionlessness and isolation until embracing an assertive Afroperipheralism.

Vancouver's Black community has developed on the margins of the diasporic discourse: it has stem far from the old slavery settlements, it is mostly constituted by interracial families who have not inherited a diasporic language, but speak the dominant English, and most of their members are immigrants or their descents. Besides, during the American-imported urban renewal in the late 1960s, Hogan's Alley, the neighborhood that concentrated the Black population of the city, was demolished and the Black people integrated throughout the city. This erasure of Black presence in the Vancouver is causing a longing for Canadian roots in the recent generations, being Wayde Compton one of the biggest figures of the city's literary scene.

Wayde Compton is one of the most brilliant and accomplished Black Canadian writers of his generation and the most prominent figure of Vancouver's Black literary scene. Through his intellectually borderless essays and his brilliant poetry, Compton explores the nebulous themes of subjectivity, nationhood and the fluid identity of Black writers in unblack British Columbia as well as the loss of roots and a racialized space in a white-dominated landscape.

Compton has documented a vast genealogy of Black presence in British Columbia dating from the Fraser Canyon Gold Rush and its literary and cultural production until the present day. One

of his latest publications is *The Outer Harbour*, a collection of short stories in which he explores place, identity and the preconceived ideas of race, migration and home to create a narrative on Vancouver. One of these stories, "The Instrument", suits best the purpose of this essay, as it exemplifies the complexity of Blackness in Canada and the fluid identity construction in this special context of Vancouver. It also portrays the important role of the USA border crossing for Black cultures and identities on both sides of the border.

"The Instrument" tells the story of two twin brothers, Albert and Donald, sons of a Black American former jazz musician who married a white Canadian woman and migrated to Canada to become a carpenter. Donald is now shooting a documentary about his father, and gathers information interviewing the other family members, but on the process he constantly receives evasive answers when asking about his father's past. The relationship is especially tense with his brother Albert. They were born craniopagus, an extremely rare condition in which conjoined twins are fused at the cranium. These kind of twins generally cannot survive due to brain malformations, but Donald and Albert underwent surgery and are now separate twins. This physical separation has also become an emotional one, with Albert holding a grudge on Donald.

In my analysis of this story, I am going to focus on this problematic fraternal relationship and also on their views on their father. I reckon we can extrapolate these aspects and their own identities to reconstruct the problematic nature of Blackness in Canada, the assertive Afroperipheralism proclaimed by Compton and the role of the US-Canada border for the fluid Black identity in Vancouver.

As I will illustrate with several excerpts, a close reading of the story will reveal different racial identifications from two generations and how they relate to the USA and their current home in Canada while showing a certain diasporic sensibility and the limitations of the nation-state. Louis Althusser (1970) said that there is no such thing as an innocent reading, [therefore] we must say what reading we are guilty of.

In my analysis of "The Instrument" I have established three interconnected symbolic layers:

The first one is the conflict based on racial identity among the main characters: Donald, Albert and their father. In fact, we are not even told their parents' names. This is probably due to the great amount of similar families in Vancouver: interracial families, mostly immigrants coming from the USA or from other parts of Canada. Their father, American by birth, moved to Canada and lives in a certain in-betweenness, a dislocation that is reflected in his family thinking he is mentally ill. Albert, one of the twins, was born in Canada but appears to have diasporic sensibilities, looking back to his American family and having being introduced to jazz music by his father after he was separated from his brother. Donald, on the other hand, can be seen as fully "Canadian" (a very unstable concept), without making any reference to his relatives in the USA. The conflicts between these characters reflect the poly-consciousness of Black Canadas and the overdetermination and indetermination of race in the Vancouverite context.

The second symbolic layer is Donald's documentary as an official recording of Black presence in Vancouver. Being the less "diasporic" of the characters, he represents the role of the official multiculturalism in Canada and the former Writing and Publications Program (WPP) organized by the late Canadian federal government's Department of Multiculturalism. One of the main criticisms on this program was that it encouraged ethnic and social minority writers to reproduce "specific" and recognizable images of ethnic or racial difference (Dawson, 2008). Quoting Dionne Brand (2002), all writers are expected to make signs, to act as au-

to-ethnographers translating the "exotic" customs of their people so that the reader may easily identify black bodies and code them.

The third layer is the twins' former craniopagic condition. They were conjoined at the top of the skull and shared the artery that irrigates the brain. This artery and their later separation recalls the 49th parallel that separates British Columbia from Washington. While in the case of Albert and Donald this "border" was physical, it is paradoxical that their separation became emotional when they underwent surgery and parted different ways, each one with his own identity formation. This can also be read as the problematic border between Canada and the USA, the historical invisibilization of the multiple crossings of it by Black peoples and the nationalist discourses, as Canada tried to avoid the cultural domination of the USA.

At the very beginning of the story we assist to the twins meeting in a bar. There, Albert recognizes his brother as *"another him"* and *"wonders if that's the exact shape he cuts, too, when he moves, how he's seen"* (Compton, 2014, p.49). We are confronted with the problem of how Black people are represented and perceived in Canada, how they are depicted in this dichotomy of the *"correct"* and the *"funky"* that also conditioned the Civil Rights Movement in the USA, where *"being impeccable, moral and well-spoken stood as evidence of the unjustificability of white American racism and brutality"* (Perry, 2004, p.4). As the plot develops, we will find more features of Albert's identity that locates him in a certain in-betweenness, crossing borders between what is deemed "Canadian" and "American".

Upon seeing Albert, almost as a reflex, *"Donald runs a hand over his own scalp, seems to catch himself doing it, puts his palm down flat on the white table. That's it, he says"* (Compton, 2014, p.49). Donald focuses on the scarred scalp, the element that connected him with his brother, a traumatic element but also the beginning of his own life separated from Albert. It is the erasure of a border, but also the loss of a contact zone.

Another symbolic element that will prove important for my analysis is color. The last part of the quotation above shows Donald rejecting his scar, this connection with his brother, this "border" and putting his palm on the white table. By doing this, he is asserting his own Black body, his Black presence on a white surface. It is the statement of a Black presence in a white land, a white nation, though officially multicultural as Canada is.

After these early depictions, Albert remembers their family from the USA. He remembers how *"their black American accents sounded thicker than his dad's, and that they all shared a similar physiognomy, though he and Donald had something Nordic and etiolated jumble into it"* (Compton, 2014, p.50).

These early passages already allow us to perceive the twins different affiliations. While both had a physical appearance different from their American cousins' due to their white mother, Donald seems to be more rooted and assertive with his presence in Canada. On the other hand, Albert is the one that thinks about the old days and their American family visiting them in Vancouver. This locates him in Canada but with his gaze on the American elements of his family. He crosses more borders and negotiate his fluid identity.

At the end of the meeting, Albert agrees on being interviewed for the documentary as long as it is not edited and his own views are clear. Albert does not want his presence to be modified, to be altered like the nation-state narrative and the official policies of multiculturalism can do to minorized groups, reducing the ways they can perform their identities to a limited set, and often constructing a hypervisible otherness. Albert shows *"disdain for those commercial and intellectual ventures that attempt to turn difference into a consumable item"* (Dawson, 2008, p.9.)

The plot advances to Donald interviewing his father and his cryptic answers:

The moon does equations and the sun does equations. But it's no duel. Because each and every star does its own equations. And those stars have planets, those planets do equations. And those planets that have moons, the moons do their equations. (Compton, 2014, p.55)

A close reading will reveal a different meaning: different identity and racial formation politics can coexist. While Clarke and Walcott's models of Blackness in Canada are different, they share the same objective: to give account and visibility to the different Black communities in Canada. Compton's perspective roots a Black tradition in British Columbia, a specific community but also one with a fluid identity. Also, while he does not feel the African American discourse as something close to Vancouver, he displays a diasporic sensibility on his use of hip hop aesthetics in his poetry in order to connect an isolated Black community with the rest of the world through the global culture of hip hop.

In "The Instrument", this diasporic sensibility can be found as well in the references to African American musicians known for their activism, often linked to Black Nationalism, such as Sun Ra –who also called his philosophy "equations"- or Roland Kirk. If we consider the political charge of these artists and their impact, we could talk about music as well as performances of race. Black artists were asserting their identity and demanding social justice with their songs. Then, Donald's father saying "*the best performances I've ever seen were the ones they failed to record […] Roland Kirk had brought the house down, and all this college kid could think about was some chewed-up tape*" (Compton, 2014, p.54) speaks of the "faking it" of racial portrayal on the media and in literature. It speaks of the failure to admit Black bodies as Canadian by the official narrative, mainly othering them or reducing them to stereotypes.

It points, as Dawson (2008) would say, to the use of race-thinking to regulate and subordinate individuals, to circumscribe the choices available to them, the extent to which race shapes readings of literary texts written by racialized writers, the process by which racialized subjects are expected to objectify themselves in accordance with the already seen and thus to authenticate the familiar images of themselves. In addition, it also parallels Donald's failure to read his father words as his views on race instead of thinking he is an "*acid casualty*".

The preoccupation on how Black Canadian presences are encoded is constant in Albert interventions. It also comes from their own childhood. In his own words, they were "*two freak twins play in a band. We couldn't help but get on TV. […] We were news rather than music. Nobody was ever going to listen to our sound no matter what we did*" (Compton, 2014, p.57). The media only visibilized them because of their bodies, their physical condition while their music and their message was not important. They were constructed as "*others*", non-normative bodies, as nation-state narrative does with non-normative individuals.

Still, they challenged the expectations and they formed a punk band with jazz influences. The American cultural elements of their father gave way to new cultural performances rooted in Canada through them. It is another feature of the Black community from Vancouver as Compton puts it.

Even if they were born in Canada, the elders of Hogan's Alley and that generation often look to America, where most of their families were from, to its forms, to its music and heroes, maybe because they were from a time closer to the initial northward migrations; we, the younger ones, feel less American, and look to them and their little community in the East End / Strathcona as something that grounds us in Canada. We need Hogan's Alley because Motown songs and Martin Luther

King are from another, different place. They come through the TV. They come through books. (Compton, 2010, p.110)

This was the case in Compton's childhood as it was in Albert's, Donald's and many other Black people in Vancouver after the demolition of Hogan's Alley. It is not a unique story if you put aside the craniopagy.

A different case of border-crossing is the one made by David Lloyd, the American millionaire and jazz aficionado who paid for the twins' surgery. He saw them on the news and recognized their father, so he paid for all the expenses. But when Lloyd travelled to Canada to meet their father, he had recorded a new demo tape, influenced by his period in Canada. The result had his wife and Lloyd thinking he had lost his mind. His experience in a new land had given him the courage to develop new skills and evolve as a musician, but those new aspects were too progressive, too avant-garde for the American jazz taste. He had explored new identity politics, but his situation of in-betweenness, his combination of old jazz knowledge and the new ideas provoked a kind of dislocation. When he met his future wife he was talking about making instruments, not playing them. "*There was this tension between being free and drifting around, which is what we sort of wanted to do, and the discipline of being in a band […] he resented the regularity, the time the band took up*" (Compton, 2014, p.62). As I have said before, in the 1960s, African American musicians were deeply involved in the social and racial activism. Music was not just music. We can interpret his exhaustion as a feeling of entrapment in the African American discourse and a longing to develop his own fluid identity, to quit playing the instrument, the identity given to him and to create a new one more suitable for him. That is what attracted him to his wife: she was Canadian. He had the idea to go away with her to Canada right from the get-go, when they first met, like she was there to take him away from the States. But once they reached Canada, he was an immigrant, not a citizen and turned his back on being a musician. It was at this point that his mind stared to (apparently) collapse.

This in-betweenness was also chosen by Albert, who decided to play "*jazz. Not punk […] Dad won. I'm halfway to being him. All I have to do is go mad and I'll be all the way there*" (Compton, 2014, p.60). But precisely because he was born Canadian and looking back to what his father taught him about his American heritage, he does not suffer from his "*spatial schizophrenia*". He develops a fluid identity with a clear diasporic sensibility.

On the other hand, Donald feels more grounded in Canada. Perhaps the clearest example takes place during his interview with his mother. They are driving home through Stanley Park and across the Lions Gate Bridge to her North Shore condo. It is a different crossing to the north, this one within Canada. Ironically they are crossing the park named after Lord Frederick Stanley, who was Governor General of Canada in the late nineteenth century, and they cross the bridge, a National Historic Site of Canada towards The Lions, two peaks north of Vancouver. The narrative of the pioneers resonates with this trail through landmarks named after a white presence, leaving them with no room to exist, with no racialized space, no landmark named after a Black presence. Still, they exist here, in a space that does not take them for granted. "Up on the bridge […] it occurs to Donald that they are not only seeing the view, they are part of the view. They are being the view" (Compton, 2014, p.60). One more time, Donald asserts his racialized presence in white Canada, in unblack British Columbia, as he realizes he is not living outside the frame, but right in the middle of an iconic Canadian landmark.

As we have seen before, this assertive Canadian identity is more problematic in the case of Albert. In his mother's house there is a picture of the twins still con-

joined, taken in East Vancouver, where most of the working class migrants would live in the 1970s. In that picture Donald is smiling wide and looking directly into the camera while Albert is beside him looking away. The image of his body has been halved by the frame, reflecting his situation of in-betweenness, his diasporic identity, not fully placed on the Canadian frame. Albert's fluid identity is best portrayed during his concert in a supper club. While he is playing guitar, he switches tones, keys, creating different sounds for the melody played by the band. His stepping out of the key of C and into A can be interpreted as another feature of his diasporic identity, where C stands for Canada and A does for America. He *"can only go so far outside […] not to completely alienate the tourists […] but he's familiar with this edge and knows just how many liberties he can afford to take per set"* (Compton, 2014, p.66) Albert is used to the limits of the nation-state narrative and to the "acceptable" performances of identity that are allowed in this context of multiculturalism to avoid sounding too eccentric, too dissonant and to not become the Other.

Yet he is balanced onstage with all eyes on him. His fingers and his mind move apart and together. He is levitating in all directions, outwardly and inwardly. He is also aware of Donald recording him, hindering his performance, too close to the musicians and even touching him with his camera. Albert's performance required a kind of non-concentration and the little room left by the camera, by the media representations and the national discourse embodied in *"his brother, a frigging camcorder all up in his face, all up in his conjuring"* (Compton, 2014, p.67) brought his performance of identity to an abrupt end.

"A freckling of red appears on Albert's white pick guard" (Compton, 2014, p.67). When Albert tries to perform his assertive fluid identity in front of the camera, it is an uncomfortable and traumatic experience resulting in red blood on white soil, white Canada. The official multiculturalism leaves little room for this kind of fluidity that defies the nation-state discourse and tries to assert a complex Black Canadian presence. As his father said before, the greatest performances are the ones that go unrecorded: the everyday, unofficial multiculturalism experienced by people on the streets, constructing their own identities aside from the dominant discourses. It takes a multiculturalism-from-below to develop these identities.

As George Elliott Clarke (2002) wrote: "*The African-Canadian consciousness is not simply dualistic. We are divided severally; we are not just 'black' and Canadian, but also adherents to a region, speakers of an 'official' language (either English or French), disciples of heterogeneous faiths, and related to a particular ethnicity (or 'national' group), all of which shapes our identities. African Canadians possess, then, not merely 'double consciousness' but what I will call poly-consciousness.*" (p.40)

In his last interview, their father explains Donald what Albert did. He did not want to be recorded performing, so using a hidden razor (an old-school trick) he cut his finger on purpose. *"The blood has a way of talking, has a way of talking you into letting it get to where it's going. […] It has a will. […] Wars have been fought over whether wine becomes blood inside yourself or not"* (Compton, 2014, pp. 69-70). He is talking about transmutation, about Albert's changing (or better rhizomatic) identity. We can infer the impossibility of imposing a rigid model of Black identity or identity of any kind in a supposedly multicultural nation-state. No national narrative can impose its expectations of identity on the minorized groups, keeping them as the Other. It is utterly impossible, even so in this global connectedness of today, in the progressivist spaces we inhabit and the diasporic sensibilities developed by oppressed or invisibilized social groups. The diversity and growing studies on the different Black Canadas prove that blood does have its will. So as Albert and many other communities that reject the other-

ness they are being imposed, his father is also "*juicing now, over and over, now and forever*" (Compton, 2014, 70), challenging the expectations put on them.

This rejection is explicitly portrayed in the final scene, when Albert confronts Donald and demands that he stops filming on the basis that he is exploiting and disrespecting their father. While Albert thinks their father is mentally ill, Donald appears to have understood some of his words. A physical fight takes place, resembling the mental struggle to negotiate their identity in this nation. Albert has discovered that the funds for Donald's documentary come from the American millionaire that had paid for their surgery. Despite his diasporic sensibility, Albert rejects someone who constantly intervenes in people's life like that, be it a transnational interaction or a national one. He is the only one that can decide on his own life, his identity and the way it will flow. This recalls Compton's rejection on African American discursive elements that dominate Black culture in America and worldwide, but cannot be implemented in Vancouver. It is a display of assertive Afroperipheralism.

This fight also corresponds the one carried before by the nativist and the diasporic approaches to Blackness in Canada as seen in George Elliott Clarke's and Rinaldo Walcott's work: two approaches that despite their apparent divergence have similar goals. Thus, the trench warfare, the anatomical echo and the familiar proximity of this powerful scene.

Conclusions

The story concludes with them hearing their father performing his new music, his transnational identity for the first time and listening to his final lament.

You had a path of cosmic heights between you. Through the artery. That's the tunnel where the thinking would flow. One man dreams of swimming and the other man kicks his feet. One man floats on water and another man prays to God. This is the way it is, the two of you, together. To suture. In tune. (Compton, 2014, p.73)

This soliloquy is their father last plea to his sons to understand each other, to regain the harmony that their former physical connection granted them. It reflects this Afroperipheralism of Compton: a fluid, rhizomatic identity grounded in Canada, in Vancouver but connected to a greater Black diasporic discourse and selecting the elements he finds to fit better in his context. He chooses a global element of Black culture such as hip hop to connect the otherwise isolated Vancouverite Black community with the diasporic discourse.

The fact that both Albert and Donald still think the other one is wrong presents a problematic future for the Black Canadas to understand each other and cooperate to build a better nation for them to live in and to finally disrupt and rewrite the national narrative that has ignored them for so long.

With this essay, I hope to contribute to a better understanding of the multiple and diverse Black Canadas and to put the spotlight on the Black Vancouverite community and the important role played by transnational border crossings for the Black identity formation in Vancouver and the rest of Canada. The studies carried out on this field keep revealing the limitations of the nation-state discourse and the official multiculturalism for Black bodies in Canada.

In the proudly multicultural context of Canada, George Elliot Clarke (2000) warns us about the "panacea politics" practiced by Canadian literary scholars eager to compensate for a history of racism by uncritically celebrating writers of color, heralding their "*difference*" And in response to that, to the attempts to calibrate and commodify what is popularly understood as their "*difference*", ethnic and racial minorities need to "*relocate the responsibility for their own subjectivity within themselves*" (Wah, 2000, p.76).

In the twenty-first century, a new

generation of writers like Dionne Brand, Esi Edugyan or Wayde Compton have brought a breeze of fresh air to the dialogue on Black Canadas and aesthetics, breaking with the essentializing forces of racialization and advocating artistic self-definition outside the expected narratives. This search for a voice of their own will bring new possibilities for a model of Black Canada deeply rooted on the land, but that also transcends the nationalist project with a diasporic sensibility.

While it is unsatisfying to merely transplant Afrocentrism or sentimental longings for a homeland or assimilate African American discourse to Black Canadas, especially in the isolated communities of British Columbia, it is equally self-defeating to try to fit themselves into the white discourse of nation-building or the spice rack vapidness of liberal multiculturalism. The assertive Afroperipheralism of Black B.C. communities can help fighting this elision, speaking and listening to each other. If an aesthetic and an identity model as this is in development, it may be best to view it as a provisional rather than as a progression towards an essence.

This is the important task resting on the shoulders of writers and scholars who, like Wayde Compton, are bringing Black Canadas to a place of their own.

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