DIONNE BRAND, AUSTIN CLARKE, AND TESSA MCWATT: BLACKENING CANADA

by

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Abstract

This project analyzes contemporary black diasporic writing in Canada, arguing that Dionne Brand, Austin Clarke and Tessa McWatt evince a unique form of double-consciousness in their writings. Their work transforms African-American double-consciousness by locating it simultaneously within both the black diaspora and the practice of Canadian multiculturalism. The objective of this project is to offer a critical framework for situating these writers within the legacy of both Black Atlantic and Canadian cultural production. These writers do not aim to resolve their double-consciousness but rather dwell within that contradictory doubleness and hyphenation, forcing nation and diaspora to contend with one another in a discomfitting and unsettling dialogue.

These authors employ the absences of the black diaspora to imagine new forms of black cultural production, multicultural citizenship and national identity. Their works produce a grammar of diasporic double-consciousness that locates the absented origins of diaspora within Canada. Brand’s depiction of temporality and Clarke’s tracing of movement explore the continuities between nation and diaspora while re-membering neglected aspects of the history of black Canada, such as the life and death of Albert Johnson. McWatt extends this blackening of nation by depicting coalitions between diasporic, indigenous, raced and sexed subjects. These authors transform hegemonic Canadian narratives of nation by dwelling in the hyphen, while their evocation of memory, absence, trauma, and desire gives blackness new meaning and legitimacy.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

As part of its official re-launch, complete with a new post-national slogan, “Time to Lead,” and post-attention-span layout, The Globe And Mail began a special series on Multiculturalism with an editorial entitled “Strike multiculturalism from the national vocabulary” (Oct 8 2010). The editorial argues that “The tired, flawed debate over the benefits of multiculturalism … has been on a continuous loop since the 1970s” and that “the debate has become more fraught, while the terminology has ceased to have any real meaning.” As a result, “Multiculturalism should be struck from the national vocabulary” (“Strike Multiculturalism”). Orwellian in its call to strike multiculturalism from the “national vocabulary,” the editorial attempts to put to rest not just the “tired, flawed debate,” but also the language of multiculturalism itself. This editorial reflects a broader multicultural malaise: Smaro Kamboureli identified this over ten years ago as a form of “multicultural fatigue” that views “multiculturalism as a fait accompli and displays impatience with anything related to racialization and ethnicity” (Scandalous Bodies 83). If Canada suffered from multicultural fatigue over ten years ago, then certainly by now the multiculturalism debate is dead. In the new post-national (Davey 1993) and trans-national (Dobson 2009) Canada of Russell Peters and Michaëlle Jean these questions of race and multiculturalism are surely tired holdovers of the 1970s and are of little interest to Canadians.

Yet, like haircuts and television programs, the politics of the 1970s finds longevity in the multiculturalism debate. Questions of race, the rights and responsibilities of immigrants, the shifting nature of citizenship, all vaguely lumped together under the banner of multiculturalism, remain vital concerns in contemporary Canada. Indeed, if multiculturalism is such a tired and
exhausted issue, why does The Globe remain so fascinated with the multiculturalism debate?\(^1\) How does one explain The Globe’s contradictory and somewhat pathological fascination with resurrecting the multiculturalism debate only to insist that it be laid to rest? I believe, contrary to The Globe, that questions of race and multiculturalism continue to torment Canadian conscience and haunt public consciousness. Public discourse seems to thrive on the contradictory notions that, while “For many Canadians, multiculturalism represents Canadian progressiveness” (Coleman, *White Civility* 7), its apparent prevalence produces a perception of Canadian identity “as crisis-ridden, as a fragile and weak entity constantly under attack and in need of vigilant defence” (Mackey 9). While the contours and “flashpoints” (“Strike Multiculturalism”) of the Canadian multicultural debate may have shifted, this chronic ambivalence characterizes Canadian public discourse on multiculturalism.

I contend that the “fraught” nature of the debate on multiculturalism is precisely what renders it meaningful and demands that it be revisited with ever more at stake in its rearticulation. This project focuses exclusively on black diasporic writing in Canada in order to differentiate between race and ethnicity in the formation of multicultural identities and to insist on the significance of the history of The Middle Passage in the constitution of the singularity of blackness within Canadian discourses of nation, multiculturalism, and diaspora. It must be asked again, for whom is multiculturalism bereft of meaning and from whose perspective does it become the means to erode rather than inflect and enrich national unity? For the black writers whose provocative and sobering corpus I examine, citizenship and community have been tenuous accomplishments at best and unfulfilled aspirations at worst for those forced into a hyphenated and interstitial relationship with Canada. The popular fatigue that The Globe expresses is shared

\(^1\) Indeed, Kamboureli’s analysis of multiculturalism fatigue focuses on Gina Mallet’s 1997 article in *The Globe and Mail* entitled “Multiculturalism: Has diversity gone too far?”
by Canada’s black population, but with completely different connotations and implications. Their ambivalence is born of struggle and alienation, of desire and hope, in a national landscape corroded by systematic racism and deprivation. The writers who inhabit this study lay claim to the space of the multicultural nation in a bid to unsettle the Canadian imaginary that excludes them.

An exemplary moment of this ambivalence occurs in Tessa McWatt’s *Out of My Skin* (1998), when the main character, Daphne, meets her biological Aunt Sheila for the first time. Sheila wonders how Daphne responds when people ask her what was your hyphenation? I have a friend, a lady from home – she makes me laugh. She says, ‘In dis country it’s important to have the propa’ hyphenation.’ Funny, makes it sound like havin the propa’ papers, but it’s just what you call yourself when someone asks you where you’re from. ‘Where are you from?’ ‘I’m a Canadian.’ ‘No, I mean where you from?’ ‘I’ve heard that so many times in thirty years. Now you know your hyphenation. West-Indian Canadian. What did you used to say?’ … ‘Nothing. I’d say nothing . . . (81; italics in original)

For Daphne and Sheila, the insistence in the question, “where you from,” reveals the trap of multicultural hyphenation that marks black Canadians as belonging elsewhere. A subtle act of exclusion emerges in the repetition in and shifting emphasis between the questions, “Where are you from” to “I mean where you from.” This barely-detectable meaning indicates the virtually invisible means through which the exclusion of black people in Canada operates. Sheila’s reflection contains echoes of the first policy statement of the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (1985): the state shall “recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all
members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage” (Preamble 1988 n. pag.). The real world effects of this policy to “recognize and promote … cultural and racial diversity” are seen in the question “where you from.” Yet, where the Act positions the multicultural subject as the acting, speaking subject (“freedom … preserve, enhance, and share”), the question of “where you from” transforms Daphne and Sheila into passive respondents to an invisible interlocutor. Both Sheila’s interrogator and the recognizing agent of the Multiculturalism Act are unmarked and invisible, just as whiteness and racial demarcation in Canada are equally unmarked and invisible. Furthermore, in Sheila’s narrating of this interpellation, the acts of recognition and hyphenation do not acknowledge the “freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve … their cultural heritage” but rather consign black Canadians to an elsewhere beyond the nation’s confines. This act of interpellation which forces Sheila to accept a hyphenated identity and presumes that she could not be from here accords with Cecil Foster’s (2007) argument that “it is nearly impossible for a … Black [person] not to be seen … as somatically Black and secondarily as Canadian” (Blackness and Modernity 390).

*Out of My Skin*’s ambivalence towards official multiculturalism is also evident in the dual responses to this forced hyphenation. Sheila is resolved to answer these questions of race and nationality, later laughing about it with her friend. Daphne’s utterance, “Nothing,” reveals her discomfort with this interrogation and with being forced to occupy the space of the hyphen. Furthermore, Daphne’s terse reply suggests that despite Sheila’s willingness to express her hyphenated identity, the process of hyphenation has rendered them both “Nothing.” Indeed, the placing of the hyphen between “West” and “Indian” and not “Canadian” signals the inability of the question to reveal anything meaningful about identity. Daphne’s statement and the silence signified by the ellipses nicely explain how the logic of the hyphen paradoxically recognizes and...
identifies and excludes and silences black people in Canada. Sheila’s laughter and Daphne’s silence function as two distinct responses to this forced hyphenation while also showing the continuity between them. The ambivalence here reflects both the pain of this exclusion and the resilience inherent in Sheila’s treatment of hyphenation as something to be dismissed and laughed about.

Like Out of My Skin, the texts in this study represent both the exclusionary and racist practices of the Canadian state as well as the strategies for coping and surviving practised by black people in Canada. As I will show, acts of narration, unlike public discourse, make it possible to navigate the contradictions of hyphenation and the doubled response of dismissal and resistance it produces, without making such ambivalence the mark of fatigue and futility. Black diasporic writing communicates not only the texture (felt experience) of the ambivalences of alienation and assimilation, but turns ambivalence towards nation and belonging into the structural principle of narrative form.

Idora, in Austin Clarke’s More (2008), offers her own twist on Daphne’s and Sheila’s predicament when she recounts an encounter with a cheerful white woman riding the subway,

“‘You don’t talk like a Negro-Canadian!’” the woman said, in a pleasant voice. “But where’re you from before that?”

“I like the cold!” Idora told her. “I was born here.”

“I know,” the woman said, in a pleasant voice. “But where’re you really from, before that?”

“I was born here.”

The woman smiled. After a while the smile disappeared. (154)
The hyphen constructs Canadian identity as an opposition between “Negro” and “Canadian,” making it impossible for Idora to identify as both. Clarke reveals how the insistent repetition of the question “where’re you from” makes it an act of disavowal rather than of exclusionary identification. Idora’s account makes this question the woman’s problem rather than hers even while the woman’s “pleasant voice” reveals how the mechanisms of racism operate subtly, invisibly, and persistently in Canada. Idora offers an insistence of her own, claiming falsely that she was born in Canada, thus disrupting the forced hyphenation and challenging her interrogator. The white woman’s identification of Idora as “Negro-Canadian” reveals how Idora’s blackness trumps and undermines any possible claims to citizenship, but the eventual disappearance of her smile suggests that Idora has succeeded in penetrating her mask of pleasantness and made her occupy Daphne’s erstwhile position of silent nothingness. Clarke reveals that Idora’s status as a “visible minority” (128) condemns her blackness to being forever incompatible with Canadianness while making her desire to belong on her terms stronger than ever.

Daphne’s expression of her own identity as “Nothing” (81) and Idora’s struggle with the “invisible visibility” (109) of blackness in Canada recall Barbara Christian’s (1990) famous description of a “persistent motif” in African-American women’s writing of the black subject as “nothing at all” and of that writing as a repeated struggle to illuminate “that which is perceived by others as not existing at all” (35). Like their African-American counterparts, the authors in this study make absence visible and silence speak. They convert the exclusion of black people from the nation into a privileged position from which to challenge the limits of nation. Christian’s emphasis on struggle is important—the writers in this study imagine their task as simultaneously difficult and inspiring. If their prolific oeuvre is anything to go by, none of them believes that the
war has been won, even if the battles they have fought in eloquent prose and poetry have made
the nation reckon with its perceived outsiders.

The first author in this study, Dionne Brand, has written extensively on the tenuous
position of black people in Canada, arguing, in her collection of essays, *A Map to the Door of No
Return: Notes to Belonging* (2002), that “Multiculturalism is relative to the state of white fear”
(79) and that the promises of Canadian multiculturalism “do not guarantee nation for Blacks in
the Diaspora” (67). Brand’s telling phrase “white fear” powerfully implicates the structures of
race and practises of racism that inform the very liberalism upon which multiculturalism
depends.² Brand explains how racism and imperialism bespeak the black subject when she writes
that “To live in the Black Diaspora is I think to live as a fiction – a creation of empires, and also
self-creation. It is to be a being living inside and outside of herself. It is to apprehend the sign one
makes yet to be unable to escape it except in radiant moments of ordinariness made like art”
(Map 18 – 19). While the examples from McWatt’s and Clarke’s fiction might seem
commonplace, Brand’s words here suggest that their ordinariness is precisely the point. Writing
for her transfigures such ordinariness, communicating how the lives of black people like Daphne
and Idora become meaningful in and through such seemingly banal moments of suffering and
self-realization. Indeed, the poetic qualities of Brand’s and Clarke’s critical essays suggest that
the plainness of prose and the mechanics of discursive logic do not capture the contradictory
sensation of what it means to be black and diasporic within multicultural Canada. Rather, it is
through these “radiant moments of ordinariness made like art” that these writers can express this

²Marlene Nourbese Philip expands on Brand’s critique of multiculturalism, arguing that multiculturalism
can “perpetuate racism by muddying waters between anti-racism and multiculturalism. It is not uncommon
to read material from various government departments that use these words interchangeably so as to
suggest that multiculturalism is synonymous with anti-racism. It is not. It never will be” (*Frontiers* 186).
Both Brand and Philip argue that multiculturalism is unable to contend with racism and they demonstrate
the manner in which race underlies conceptions of citizenship.
sense of contradictory doubleness, of being “inside and outside” of oneself, of being paradoxically recognized “by others as not existing at all” and of attempting to speak while being rendered “Nothing.” When Brand describes black diasporic subjectivity as akin to living “as a fiction,” she insists on the importance of lives mediated and constructed by narrative as well as on a poetic sensibility that revels in contradiction. To my mind, Brand draws attention to the distinctive quality of “fictions”—their evocation of the affect and texture of lives that are unavailable to scholarly and empirical texts. The contradictions of race and multiculturalism’s failure to address systemic racism are captured in these poems, essays and novels in ways that sociological reports and statistical analyses cannot duplicate. While ethnographic accounts

3Frances Henry and Carol Tator define democratic racism as an ideology in which “two conflicting sets of values are made congruent with each other. Democratic principles such as equality, fairness, and justice conflict with, but also ... coexist with, racist attitudes and behaviours” (228). While their analysis is invaluable to this project, they acknowledge that the contradictory and invisible nature of democratic racism makes it “an elusive concept” (228). This elusiveness is evident in their vague and weak claim that democratic racism constitutes “negative feelings about minority groups and differential treatment of them.” In a different context, Will Kymlicka’s theory of minority rights within a liberal framework, for instance, is unable to contend with the particular forms of racism that black people experience in Canada. He concedes that “Blacks in Canada, particularly immigrants from the Caribbean, face many barriers to integration not faced by other immigrants, including non-white immigrants” (Vernacular 178). Kymlicka goes on to suggest that many immigrants have become successful “precisely by gaining some distance from ‘blacks’. They have come to be seen as ‘respectable’, like whites, in contrast to the ‘unruly’ Blacks. They are seen as decent, hard-working and law-abiding citizens, as opposed to the promiscuous, lazy, and criminal Blacks” (Vernacular 189). Despite the strength of Kymlicka’s analysis he concludes with the vague and generalized statement that given the particularly pernicious form of racism that black people experience in Canada, “prejudice against ‘blacks’ may prove very difficult to dispel” (Vernacular 191). In one sense perhaps Kymlicka’s weak conclusion merely reveals the limitations of his framework of minority rights within liberalism. Yet Henry, Tator, and Kymlicka repeatedly offer vague and weak summations of the persistence of racism and the affective experience of racism within liberal democracy. While these writers have exercised a great deal of influence on public discourse, their analyses need to be supplemented with literary texts that illuminate the contradictions of black life in Canada. Throughout this project I show how fictive texts complicate the claims made by social scientists and critical race theorists in ways that show how racism in Canada is far more complicated than “negative feelings about minority groups.” While Henry and Tator’s model of democratic racism is necessary for my analysis of the case of Albert Johnson (Chapter Three), Brand’s and Clarke’s emplotment of Johnson’s life and death offers a far sharper account of the felt experiences of racism than Henry and Tator’s sociological discourse allows. Furthermore, Brand and Clarke’s use of fictive modes enables them to show how the alleged neutrality of sociological analysis is biased against black people. It is telling that when Clarke and Brand do venture into public debate and discourse, they use narrative to reveal the limitations and gaps of the discourse of social science.
might give voice to black subjects, fictions travel both inside and outside, simultaneously aware of acting and signifying, of being perceived and spoken for.

Dionne Brand, Austin Clarke, and Tessa McWatt are my chosen examples, within the annals of black literary production in Canada, of what Paul Gilroy describes as “a stereoscopic sensibility adequate to building a dialogue with the West: within and without” (Black Atlantic 196). As I have begun to argue, Gilroy’s expression “within and without” underscores the interstitial position of the black subject in relation to nation and modernity. Gilroy and the subjects of my dissertation take their cue from W.E.B. Du Bois’s famous exposition of double-consciousness. In The Souls of Black Folk (1903) Du Bois attempts to answer the question “How does it feel to be a problem” (2)? He writes

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (3)

This visceral depiction of double-consciousness is, however, at odds with Canadian multiculturalism’s claim to sever the ties between race and citizenship, to work against this “feel[ing] of twoness” and to “recognize and promote” (Canadian Multiculturalism Act, Preamble n. pag.) the manifold identities of all Canadians. George Elliott Clarke puts Du Bois into dialogue with Canadian multiculturalism thus:

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4 J.S. Woodsworth’s famous report on immigrants to Canada, Strangers within our gates (1909), describes black people in precisely these terms of being a problem. He argues that while “Neither the negro nor the Indian are immigrants, … they are so entirely different from the ordinary white population that some mention of them is necessary if we would understand the complexity of our problems. We group them together merely because both stand out entirely by themselves” (158).
Tussling with our own ‘double consciousness,’ African Canadians question whether the ‘Canadian’ half of the epithet ‘African-Canadian’ is merely a convenience referring to our geographic residency, or whether it hints at an identity. Is it possible to think of the hyphen as an ampersand, or is it really a double-edged minus sign? Is an ‘African Canadian’ always more black than Canadian? … Yet, 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, … African Canadians possess, then, not merely ‘double consciousness’ but what I will call ‘poly-consciousness’. (Odysseys 40)

For Clarke the question of African-Canadian identity turns on the meaning of the hyphen; in Daphne’s terms, whether it suggests a uniting of “black” and “Canada” or a sundering, a reduction of the black Canadian subject to “Nothing.” Du Bois stresses “twoness;” Clarke, on the contrary, insists that African-Canadian identity exhibits poly-consciousness. Clarke denies the tension Daphne discerns or even the violence Du Bois describes in favour of containing blackness within the discourse of multiculturalism. This tendency is evident in his introduction to Eyeing the North Star: Directions in African-Canadian Literature (1997) where he describes the evolution of his poetic voice. Clarke moves from a consciousness that is “Quasi-Canadian, I dreamed in the haven of the hyphen” to finding “a voice that was black – and Canadian – like me” (xii; italics in original). Progressing from the “haven of the hyphen” to the ampersand of “black – and Canadian” is the process of maturation and coming-to-voice that Clarke envisions for African-Canadians.

George Elliott Clarke’s views are not reflected by the writers in this study for whom blackness remains a privileged signifier of identity and for whom the meaning of the hyphen in
black-Canadian identity is at best unresolved and at worst a threat rather than a haven. Daphne’s expression of “Nothing” reveals the extent to which, for her, the hyphen of black-Canadian identity remains a “double-edged minus sign.” Marlene Nourbese Philip (1992) describes this split of double-consciousness when she describes herself “arguing out of both sides of my mouth” (*Frontiers* 20) and when she argues that “The only way the African artist could be in this world, … was to give voice to this split image of voice silence. Ways to transcend that contradiction had to and still have to be developed” (*She tries her tongue* 16). Clarke claims to have found a voice that is both “black – and Canadian – like me,” but Philip’s work speaks from the split “image of voice silence” that emerges from the contradictions of black life in Canada. While Philip may long for the transcendence that George Elliott Clarke claims to have achieved, her poetic voice dwells in and speaks from that split of double-consciousness. This split speaks to the contradictions of being black in Canada, to the “voice silence” of living the hyphen as a minus sign and of being rendered “Nothing.” The writers in this study repeatedly engage the difficulty of being “black – and Canadian” as well as the question “How does it feel to be a problem?” In Austin Clarke’s *More*, Bertram is more explicit in his denouncing of hyphenated multiculturalism: “This country? Blasted raciss! Canada? Canada don’t welcome black people. So, don’t let nobody fool you. All this shite about multiculturalisms” (87)! Another character in the novel exclaims “Multiculturalism, my ass! Who they fooling? They think Wessindians is fools? Because we don’t carry-on, and shed tears, and demonstrate when a piece o’ racism lash our ass, they think we is fools” (256)? In Austin Clarke’s work, the “soothing balm of

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5Philip gives a vivid image of her own double-consciousness in her depiction of the two oppositional imaginary figures that she imagines guide her writing. The first is “Male, white and oxford-educated, he stands over my right shoulder; [the second] … is old, Black and wise and stands over my left shoulder – two archetypal figures symbolizing the two traditions that permeate my work” (*Frontiers* 26). Philip’s position, between these figures and mediating their voices, expresses the split that marks her poetic voice.
‘multiculturalism’ cannot mask racism” (Lewis 2) nor can it disrupt the “invisible visibility” of black people in Canada. His characters are not “black – and Canadian” but rather experience the forced abjection of black people from Canada. In Austin Clarke’s texts, the violence of the whip of slavery and colonialism continues to be felt in multicultural Canada when a “piece o’ racism lash our ass.”

George Elliott Clarke’s compatriots reject the consolations of poly-consciousness for the vigilance that Du Bois’s notion of double consciousness demands. In place of the “haven” of the hyphen, they view the hyphen as that which isolates, segments and atomizes the black and Canadian aspects of identity, expressing a diasporic double-consciousness which brings black and Canadian into a troubled dialogue with one another. Yet despite the isolation of the hyphen, these writers also imagine black and Canadian as interrelated and they undermine the question “Where you from” by locating black diasporic subjectivity, in however difficult and contested a fashion, here, in Canada. Rather than take their cue from George Elliott Clarke’s attempts to transform the hyphen forcibly into an ampersand, these writers dwell in and speak from the contradictory space of the hyphen and from the position of the black Canadian subject as a “problem.” While Brand insists that the promises of multiculturalism “do not guarantee nation for Blacks in the Diaspora” (Map 67), this lack of a guarantee of nation becomes a position of critique throughout the texts in this study. If the hyphen is a double-edged minus sign, these writers show that subtraction paradoxically adds up to a unique position of critique and agency. These writers re-imagine the hyphen in George Elliott Clarke’s expression of “black – and Canadian” as a minus sign expressing abjection. Yet Clarke’s pairing of the hyphen with “and” unintentionally expresses the strange combination of abjection and inclusion, absence and presence, minus and joining that reveals how these authors locate blackness, however uncomfortably, within the nation. This shift
in emphasis in their work means that the experience of being positioned outside of the nation yet also remaining decidedly within the nation is profoundly discomfiting. Even the dialogue that Gilroy champions is not without its pitfalls for these writers because it assumes a level playing field, a complacency these writers cannot afford.

In contrast to George Elliott Clarke’s attempts to place African-Canadian writing specifically within the nation, the diasporic positioning of each of these writers stresses an irresolvable betweenness. The texts in this study are not “African-Canadian literature” that are “fated to manifest such multiculturalism” (Clarke, Eyeing the North Star xiii), but are more accurately described in Andrea Davis’s (2007) words: “the very diasporic character of black Canadian literature – its pluralism and heterogeneity – articulate a deliberately transgressive Canadian-ness” (31). Gilroy, in another context, also insists on the “deliberately transgressive” elements of black interstitiality: “where racist, nationalist, or ethnically absolutist discourses orchestrate political relationships so that these identities appear to be mutually exclusive, occupying the space between them or trying to demonstrate their continuity has been viewed as a provocative and even oppositional act of political insubordination” (Black Atlantic 1). While the authors in this study are certainly engaged in writing Canada, their efforts reject the premature inclusiveness of Clarke’s “black - and Canadian” in favour of a deliberate expression of blackness and/as transgression. The space these writers inhabit is one in which there is no “propa’ hyphenation”’ but rather black identities constituted in difference and betweenness. I suggest that Clarke’s expression of being “black – and Canadian” attempts to affirm both aspects of his identity and imagine Canada as home to particular modes of blackness, while these writers are “deliberately transgressive” in their remaking of the meaning of both black and Canadian. Certainly Clarke’s polyconsciousness practises a kind of betweenness yet it is a betweenness that
attempts to prematurely suture black and Canadian. The writers in this study practise a
betweenness that does not aim to reconcile black and Canada but rather dwells in the space of the
double-edged minus sign, writing against the nation rather than into a comfortable space within
the nation. Clarke's notion of blackness comfortably inhabits Canada whereas these writers
employ double-consciousness to demonstrate not only how Canada tears them asunder but how
their presence tears the nation asunder.

If Clarke helps me comprehend what the subjects of my investigation do not espouse,
Rinaldo Walcott’s theory of “blackening” helps me come to terms with what they do. Walcott’s
theory is attentive to both the violent and hopeful aspects of this doubly-conscious diasporic
writing and of its “deliberately transgressive Canadian-ness.” Furthermore, Walcott’s blackening
can be read as an adaptation rather than a repudiation of double-consciousness, or, as George
Elliott Clarke imagines, a multiplication of modes of belonging. As Walcott explains,

By blackening I signal two important but related ideas. First, that nation-state
administrators try to force what it means to be black on people through various
mechanisms of domination and subordination. … On the other hand, blackening also
signals the various inscriptions with which black people mark their bodies … and the
discourses and articulations that both contest and resist subordination and domination.

(Black Like Who 125)

Walcott posits two aspects of blackening: the state construction of blackness as foreign,
problematic and criminal, and the means by which black people “contest and resist” those forms
of “subordination and domination,” conceiving of black subjectivity outside dominant paradigms
and oppressive stereotypes. Clarke insists that “blackness possesses a Canadian dimension that is
recognized by engaging with black cultural works located here” (Odysseys 10; italics in original).
The authors in this study, however, endorse Walcott’s more complicated argument – black writing in Canada employs “a deterritorialized strategy that is consciously aware of the ground of the nation from which it speaks” (*Black Like Who* 15). These writers use their consciousness of location against received notions of belonging and imposed forms of abjection from the body politic. Clarke conceives of black and Canadian identity as a discrete, definable possession whereas Walcott conceives of black identity as process, performance and strategy. Walcott argues that black subjectivity in Canada comes to be articulated through the signifying practices of black people and cannot be known a priori or extracted from black cultural works.\(^6\) Blackening stresses the importance of race in multicultural discourse but undermines black as a stable identity located in skin or corporeality. Clarke transforms abjection into acceptance and familiarity while blackening transforms abjection into transgression, disrupting the meanings of both “black – and Canadian” in the process. Further, Walcott’s analysis retains the relevance of race in thinking about multiculturalism but insists on the ways in which blackness is produced performatively, discursively, and contextually. Idora affirms Walcott’s view, explaining, “This is the first thing you learned as a coloured person in Toronto. I am talking about survival now! Survival, girl! Improvisation, girl” (58).

Whereas Clarke argues that African-Canadian people “possess ... poly-consciousness” Walcott conceives of black identity as produced through acts of blackening. Walcott’s insistence on identity as discursive and strategic is echoed by Lily Cho in her argument that “diaspora must

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\(^6\)The difference between Walcott’s and Clarke’s positions on blackness and nation is evident in the titles of their respective collections. Walcott’s *Black Like Who? Writing Black, Canada* (1997) poses blackness as a question and refuses to make any organic link between “Writing,” “Black” and “Canada” (the isolation of each term can be read as a disruption of Jonathan Kertzer’s formulation of his reading practice that links “national + literary + history”). In contrast, Clarke’s *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature* posits Canada as the site of arrival and “Home” and the terms Home, Mapping and African-Canadian signifies certitude anchored by the secure position of the African-Canadian subject in the nation.
be understood as a *condition of subjectivity* and not as an object of analysis” (11; italics in original). Diaspora theorists such as Robin Cohen (1997) define the black diaspora through verifiable and measurable sociological qualities such as a “common history of forcible dispersion through the slave trade” (144) or “The deployment of skin colour ... as a signifier of status, power and opportunity” (144). For Cho, however, to be diasporic is not a quantifiable feature of identity but rather a condition of subjectivity. She writes that

one *becomes* diasporic through a complex process of memory and emergence. Thus, to be black, for example does not automatically translate into a state of being within the black diaspora. ... Black diaspora subjectivity emerges in what it means to be black and live through the displacements of slavery and to carry into the future the memory of the losses compelled by the legacy of slavery, to be torn by the ambivalence of mourning losses that are both your own and yet not quite your own. (21; italics in original)

“Negro-Canadian” or “African-Canadian” suggest stable, if hyphenated, identities to be possessed, and rooted in the place ‘where you’re really from,’ but Walcott, Cho and the writers in this study insist that identity is always “torn by the ambivalence of mourning.” Cho’s notion of becoming diasporic provides a vocabulary for how these acts of blackening not only conceive of black diasporic identity but also how black diasporic people rewrite Canada as a site within the black diaspora. In place of securing black people’s place within the nation, these writers use their position of hyphenation and abjection to disrupt the homogeneity of the nation and to show how Canada can become diasporic. Brand’s depiction of Toronto as “not a place of origins” but rather “a place of transmigrations and transmogrifications” (*Map* 62) rewrites Canada as a diasporic and transnational space. She describes her literary project as the struggle to “describe this mix of utter, hopeless pain and elation leaning against the door” (*Map* 41), and in this sense, Brand’s
image of the Door of No Return immediately conjures up the memory of and emergence from the Middle Passage, while the leaning suggests the push and pull of “losses that are both your own and yet not quite your own.” Walcott and Cho provide a necessary framework for reading these writers’ depiction of black diasporic life in Canada and the way in which they reimagine Canada as a space in the black diaspora. Unlike Clarke’s polyconsciousness, Walcott and Cho show how black diasporic writing in Canada does not attempt to find a place within the nation but rather uses diasporic attention to space, movement, and difference to transgress and push open the borders of the nation. Furthermore, their attention to the discursive production of identity is particularly suited to analyzing how black diasporic narratives rewrite the narration of Canada.

Walcott’s analysis of the disciplinary and liberating aspects of blackening and Cho’s depiction of the diasporic subject “torn by the ambivalences of mourning” both recall Du Bois’s characterization of the black subject who is in constant danger of being “torn asunder.” The link between Cho and Du Bois indicates not merely the shared interstitality of both the American “Negro” and the black Canadian diasporic subject but also the sense of tearing, contradiction and division that is at the core of both subjectivities: the recurring sense of “How does it feel to be a problem.” Hortense Spillers argues that Du Bois “was trying to … posit – an ontological meaning in the dilemma of blackness” (“All The Things” 104; italics in original) and I argue that this tearing, paradoxically enough, is that ontological meaning. Each of these writers occupies a position caught between nation and diaspora and in this sense is in constant danger of being, like Du Bois’s doubly-conscious black subject, “torn asunder.” Du Bois’s phrase captures the violence and potential for self-annihilation that characterizes many of the depictions of double-consciousness in these texts. This possibility of violence and annihilation underwrites the “syncretic pattern[s]” and creative acts of crossing in each of these texts in ways that are not
captured by Clarke’s polyconsciousness. For instance, Brand describes her own discomfort towards any “seamless, undifferentiated” (*Bread Out of Stone* 30) identity or form of belonging, and so in her writing the act of being “torn asunder” gestures towards more fluid and unsutured evocations of identity. Whereas Brand revels in this feeling of identity “torn asunder,” Austin Clarke’s depiction of black male diasporic subjects torn between Canada and the Caribbean is less liberating and sanguine. This is evident in the title of Clarke’s first novel, *Survivors of the Crossing* (1964) as it is in McWatt’s *Out of My Skin* in which Daphne describes her sensation of “falling between the cracks, of stepping and missing. The same feeling that had persisted throughout most of her life” (2). Daphne links “the appearance of the crack” to the recurring question “what are you” (17; italics in original) suggesting that double consciousness irradiates the gestures, postures and affectations of black diasporic life and survival in Canada. “Home” in George Elliott Clarke’s sense is fractured by and refracted through being torn asunder rather than serving to suture the gap between black and Canadian selves.

When this project began, I planned to focus on the depiction of the black body within black diasporic writing, particularly the manner in which the black body is often the privileged signifier of difference within discourses of race. Indeed, Du Bois’s original description of double-consciousness imagines the black subject trapped within “one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.” Similarly, in his explication of blackening, Walcott insists that the “inscriptions with which black people mark their bodies” are critical to theorizing black subjectivity in Canada. There is a long history of critical race theory and black criticism that examines, critiques, reclaims and resists the link between black identity and the body.7 While

7David Theo Goldberg (1990), for instance, argues “As a mode of exclusion, racist discourse assumes authority and is vested with power, literally and symbolically, in bodily terms. They are human bodies that are classified, ordered, valorized, and devalued” (306). Marlene Nourbese Philip links this racist discourse
Paul Gilroy argues that the link between the black body and racial discourse has changed such that “Nobody fills old skulls with lead shot these days” (*Against Race* 45). Farah Jasmine Griffin (1996) insists that the contemporary “discourse of black inferiority … stands on ‘evidence’ derived from cranial measurements and genital mutilation” (520). Similarly, Sylvia Wynter forcefully elaborates the manner in which the black body was “made into the physical referent of the idea of the irrational / subrational Human Other” (“Unsettling”266) and Cornel West (1993) confirms that “White supremacist ideology is based first and foremost on the degradation of black bodies in order to control them” (122). Harriet Jacob’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) repeatedly illustrates this connection between white supremacy and the degradation of black bodies, particularly in the transformation of torture and violence committed against those bodies into spectacle. As she recalls her narrative, Jacobs insists “even now … my body still suffers from the effects of that long imprisonment, to say nothing of my soul” (224). Griffin argues that African-American writers, from Jacobs onwards, “serve to make the wounds of … [slavery and white supremacy] real” and that their writing of the body “is not a matter of getting back to a ‘truer’ self, but instead of claiming the body, scars and all – in a narrative of love and care” (521). Griffin cites a passage from Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) where Beloved explains “we are all trying to leave our bodies behind” (210) while Baby Suggs insists that she “should always listen to my body and love it” (209). This struggle, between leaving the body behind and listening to and loving the body, constitutes one of the central dilemmas of African-American
double-consciousness as it attempts to contend with both the horrors committed against the black body and the possibility of reclaiming that body. While these critics are diverse and beyond the scope of this project, their work provides a framework for identifying the racist biological determinism with which each of these writers contends. These critics show how the devalued black body is integral to modernity and they critique that devaluing and rewrite blackness and modernity in new terms. Christina Sharpe (2010) argues that this act of rewriting produces “Monstrous Intimacies” whereby “Those black and blackened bodies become the bearers … of the knowledge of certain subjection as well as the placeholders of freedom” (4). She argues that those blackened bodies constitute “master narratives of violence and forced submission” but that those “master narratives” can be “read or reinscribed as consent or affection” (4). Sharpe’s expression of the “Monstrous Intimacies” of the narratives of violence committed against the black body illuminates the paradox of attempting to narrate the unspeakable physical violence committed against black people.

The struggle to give voice to both the “subjection” and “freedom” of the black body is present throughout black women’s critical and fictive writing. Indeed, one of the earliest black feminist collections, *All the Women are White, all the Blacks are Men, but Some of Us are Brave* (1982), repeatedly analyzes the importance of the black female body while challenging stable notions of black and women. Hortense Spillers’s influential article “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book” (1987) takes up this challenge of trying to find a language for the black female body, arguing that it is a signifier “so loaded with mythical prepossession

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9 Kara Keeling (2006) argues that “black females’ entry into the feminine is marked over time by struggles to ‘reconstruct womanhood’ in a way that could accommodate visibly black and female bodies” (83). *All the Women are White, all the Blacks are Men, but Some of Us are Brave* marks a break in that attempt to reconstruct womanhood and instead challenges the conception of woman both within white patriarchy and within the black power movement. See particularly Michelle Wallace’s “A Black Feminist’s Search for Sisterhood” (1982) and Barbara Smith’s “Toward a Black Feminist Criticism” (1985).
that there is no easy way for the agent buried beneath … to come clean” (65).  

Spillers argues that the black female body constitutes an “American grammar,” a “locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth” (65). Carol Henderson takes up Spillers’s work in her own argument, writing that the “scarring” of the black body constitutes “symbolic indicators [that] framed a context for national and international ‘discussions’ of the ownership of the black body as America’s ‘language’” (27). Both Spillers and Henderson insist on the black body as a kind of grammar and signification and not as inert materiality itself. Even though Spillers is often interpreted as discussing the body itself, she is in fact theorizing the difficulty of finding an adequate language to account for black women’s embodiment that is not predetermined by this “American grammar.”

Spillers’s argument that the black female body constitutes an “American Grammar” indicates how that body is already spoken-for, already made to signify within discourses of race, class, sexuality and gender. Spillers’s work identifies that “Grammar” of the black female body in order to enable the subject “buried beneath … to come clean” (65). In a later reflection on her article, Spillers explains, “I thought … before I can get to the subject of the sexuality of black women I didn’t see a vocabulary that would make it possible to entertain the sexuality of black women in any way that was other than traumatic. Before you could have a conversation about sexuality of black women you had to clear the … field of static” (301). The “mythical prepossession” of the black female body and the “historical legacy that deems black women [as] ‘over-sexed’” (Griffin 526) renders any depiction of the black body, particularly the sexualized body, suspect, in danger as such depiction always is, of collapsing into racist stereotypes or into irrevocably traumatized entities. What Spillers’s (and others’) arguments reveal is the

10 Her quotation refers specifically to the black, female body and the stereotypes of black women but it can also be applied to the black body more generally.
impossibility of discussing the unmediated, material body itself as it is pre-written by the “grammar” of the black body.

Marlene Nourbese Philip explains this difference between writing the body and writing the “grammar” of the body when she argues, “I want to write about kinky hair and flat noses – maybe I should be writing about the language that kinked the hair and flattened noses, made jaws prognathus” (She tries her tongue 20; italics in original). Philip, Spillers, Henderson and Sharpe all identify the difficulty of writing the black body itself and instead write the grammar, language, postures, intimacies and performances of the body. As this study progressed, I found that these writers were contending with the discursive violence of representations that mediate the possibilities of embodiment, constituting the “grammar” of the black body, and looking for an alternative grammar of the body. Dionne Brand, in “This Body For Itself” (1994), situates her own writing of the body within the history of depictions of the black female body and black female sexuality. While Brand longs for a means to write “This Body For Itself,” she finds the task impossible and turns this desire for the body into an intransitive desire for language instead. Where past conceptions of writing the body aim towards recovering the black female body, Brand wants to break from these feminist or womanist projects to “heal” the body or to articulate some restored black female corporeality, sexuality or subjectivity. Brand finds that the available grammar of the black female body is a heteronormative grammar that privileges “seamless, undifferentiated female sex” (Bread 30). As such, Brand builds on the work of Spillers and others in her struggle for a grammar of the body, but she also draws attention to what that grammar has

11Philip describes this later as “a profound eruption of the body into the text of She Tries Her Tongue” (She tries 24). In her collection of essays, Frontiers (1992), Philip asserts that “Racism is a gut issue” (212) yet she clarifies her conception of the link between race and the body when she writes, “My body and its body intelligence – I include the mind in this concept – are deeply involved and implicated in the practice of racism” (212). For Philip, the body is linked to the mind and to language in a way that makes it impossible to describe the extra-linguistic body.
excluded. As I show, Brand’s poetics is concerned with the absences of black diasporic life and her writing of the body renders that absence material and corporeal. In place of the recovery of the black female body, Brand insists on the manner in which corporeality is textual. In *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (2002) she describes the black body as a “cipher of dreams, memories, horrors, and fears” (40)suggesting that she conceives of the body more as a puzzle or a hieroglyph; materiality for Brand inheres in the letter rather than the body.\(^{12}\) Brand differs from a number of earlier black feminist critics whose work is concerned with reclaiming a black female body and black female sexuality.\(^{13}\) Brand instead writes the gestures, performances, and inscriptions of the body as they render present the absences of the black diaspora.

In this respect Brand’s depiction of the body is in line with Barbara Smith’s argument that “A Black feminist approach” necessarily “embodies the realization that the politics of sex as well as the politics of race and class are crucially interlocking factors in the works of Black women writers” (170). Smith’s language of embodiment deconstructs the opposition between

\(^{12}\)Brand’s conception of the grammar of the body differs from that of June Jordan (1988) who insists, “Our language devolves from a culture that abhors all abstraction, or anything tending to obscure or delete the fact of the human being who is here and now/the truth of the person who is speaking or listening” (129). Audre Lorde(1984) declares, “We are African women and we know, in our blood’s telling, the tenderness with which our foremothers held each other. It is that connection which we are seeking. We have the stories of Black women who healed each other’s wounds” (*Sister Outsider* 152). Brand is more sceptical of the authenticity of blood, tenderness, truth, or healing. For her, speaking and listening irrevocably alter black women’s relationships to their bodies and each other just as they constitute and exceed the knowledge of embodiment.

\(^{13}\)Certainly early black feminist criticism is diverse and offers a varied and complicated depiction of the black female body. Indeed, while Lorde’s phrase, “our blood’s telling,” is concerned with the materiality of the body and the history of blood, it is also attuned to the act of telling and the narrating of that body and history. Brand’s work aligns with those writers and critics who are equally concerned with the materiality itself of the body and with the varied and multiple ways in which the act of telling can transform the signification of the body. Barbara Smith, for instance, in “Toward a Black Feminist Criticism” (1985) explains some early black feminists’ reluctance to discuss sexual differences: “Heterosexual privilege is usually the only privilege that Black women have. None of us have racial or sexual privilege, almost none of us have class privilege, maintaining ‘straightness’ is our last resort” (171). Patricia Hill Collins reiterates Smith’s position in *Black Feminist Thought* (2000), arguing that “Black lesbian relationships are not only threatening to intersecting systems of oppression, they can be highly threatening to heterosexual African-American women’s already assaulted sense of self” (167).
body and text in a way that reveals the manner in which any alleged depiction of the unmediated body is already inflected by the politics of sex, race and class. I discovered that these inscriptions of blackening were not about the body itself but about how “inscriptions” de “cipher” the body as it shapes subjectivity. In this respect, Henderson’s argument that the “textual body stands as a counter to the known socially deviant black body” (18) suggests the way in which writing the affectations and gestures of the body becomes a means of resisting the equating of black subjectivity with the body and of disrupting a monolithic and stereotypical conception of blackness. This is certainly true of Brand’s and Austin Clarke’s depiction of Albert Johnson’s “known socially deviant black body.” They show how the Canadian grammar of race transforms Johnson’s black body into a cipher of the “horrors, and fears” of white Canada. Johnson’s body, in the Canadian public sphere, becomes contiguous with black deviance and criminality. Brand and Clarke challenge that depiction of the black body in their rewriting of Johnson and his body. Yet they do not attempt to recover Johnson’s true body but rather make his body matter and signify differently. Brand in thirsty (2002) and Clarke in More (as well as other texts) rewrite Johnson’s character and body to challenge this disciplinary blackening, to give him a history and character that exceeds the mainstream media depiction of him as a one-dimensional stereotypical black man. Brand and Clarke engage in a “claiming [of] the body, scars and all – in a narrative of love and care” (521) in order to make Johnson’s body matter. This is akin to what Denise deCaires Narain (2004) describes as a “remetaphorization” (154; italics in original) whereby the original body is not recovered but rather the body is made to signify differently. Brand depicts Johnson as caesura and lacuna, thus foregrounding his physical and historical absence. Similarly, Clarke narrates Johnson’s death through the collective recollections of his characters. Both Brand and Clarke rewrite Johnson’s death and his body to highlight the absenting of blackness from the
nation. Writing Johnson’s body through metaphors and motifs of absence enables Brand and Clarke to resist the depiction of Johnson as a “known socially deviant black body,” revealing, instead, how that deviance and that knowing of the black body is produced. Brand and Clarke also rewrite Johnson’s life to treat him as a subject that isn’t “immaculate with his disaster” (Brand, *thirsty* IX), thus recovering Johnson from one-dimensional stereotypes of black masculinity. Their rewriting blackens Canada, insisting on the presence, however troubled, of black people within the nation. The texts that I have selected in this study do not attempt to recover an unmediated, original or restored black body but rather make the gestures, longings and postures of the black body signify something other than one-dimensional, stereotypical blackness. Furthermore, their writing engages in a blackening of Canada by making visible the abjection of black bodies from the nation and by insisting that black bodies belong here.

The texts that I have chosen in this project reflect my eclectic interests but they also occupy an exemplary position in the broader field of black diasporic writing in Canada. They propel the reigning motifs, themes and formal experiments of black diasporic writing in new directions. I have selected these texts for their diverse articulations of blackening and their varied inscriptions of diasporic double-consciousness. My selection of texts has also been guided by George Elliott Clarke’s call for a literate criticism of black, diasporic authors as the texts under scrutiny merit the kind of close reading and rigorous literary analysis that Clarke calls for. Moreover, they have only rarely, if at all, been considered by existing scholarship.

Chapter Two is an interpretation of Dionne Brand’s invention of diasporic temporality. Brand is a major figure in black diasporic writing in Canada and her place in this study is virtually assured. Amongst contemporary black writers, Brand has received perhaps the most scholarly attention because her writing engages the questions of difference and identity that
continue to intrigue Canadian critics. I argue that Brand’s poetry, fiction and criticism depict diasporic double-consciousness through the diasporic temporality of the metaphor of the door of no return. The door of no return is a metaphor for the traumas of the past as well as for the possibilities of the future. Brand’s attention to desire, delay, anticipation, history, and memory within diasporic time makes her emblematic of a whole host of black diasporic preoccupations and places her writing on par with the works of Marlene Nourbese Philip (1989), Makeda Silvera (2003), Claire Harris (1992), Shani Mootoo (1996), and Lillian Allen (1993). Each of these writers stresses the desire to recover or return from the rupture of diaspora or the Middle Passage. Brand, however, uniquely takes up the task of speaking from that rupture and of desiring neither a return home, to the origins of the past, or a resolution of identity or dislocation in the future.

These other writers tend to write the Middle Passage and the dislocation of diaspora as singularly traumatic spaces, whereas Brand writes both the trauma and possibilities that emerge from the absences and losses of black diasporic life. Brand rewrites the betweenness of the diaspora as a productive openness that disrupts the seemingly stable temporalities and borders of the nation. Furthermore, unlike these other writers, Brand’s texts are concerned with rewriting Canada and Canadian multiculturalism. Brand blackens Canada by locating the absences that she discerns in the diaspora within the nation, thus figuring the nation as lacking, incomplete and in a process of “becoming diasporic.” Her articulation of diasporic time in her poetry transgresses not only conventional notions of blackness and diaspora but also engages in a blackening of the nation through her unique generic experiments and by her inscription of diasporic time and subjects within Canada.

In Chapter Three, I move from poetry to prose and from temporal to spatial concerns in my reading of the themes of mobility and immobility in Austin Clarke’s recent fiction. Like
Brand, Clarke is a major figure in black diasporic writing in Canada. Clarke is one of the first, most widely published, and most prolific, black diasporic authors in Canada. Clarke expresses the unspeakable and intangible dimensions of double-consciousness as well as the difference between masculine and feminine diasporic subjects through his employment of the motifs of movement and (im)mobility. I argue that Clarke’s blackening of Canada operates through his inscription of movement and his rewriting of the Jonah myth to locate the black diasporic subject, however alienated, within the nation, and to rewrite the nation as one route within the diaspora. Clarke rewrites the monstrous presence of the black subject in the nation as the monstrous nation that aims to devour its black citizens. “Sometimes, A Motherless Child” (1992), “I’m Running For My Life” (1992), “Canadian Experience” (1996), The Origin of Waves (1997), The Polished Hoe (2002) and More (2008) are singular narrations of the lives of first and second generation black migrants from the Caribbean to Canada. Clarke’s work is part of a broader field of authors that includes Dany Laferrière (1985), Cyril Dabydeen (1997), and Cecil Foster (1998). Like Brand, Clarke differs from his compatriots in his insistence on speaking from the space of the hyphen rather than desiring a resolution of that hyphenated betweenness. Unlike these other writers, Clarke privileges routes over roots and movement over arrival. His inscription of movement within Canada blackens Canada as one route within the black diaspora, one site of crossing rather than as a final destination or space of arrival for black people. Clarke’s characters are The Survivors of the Crossing (1964) and throughout his body of work he details the means by which they survive, improvise and struggle within their ongoing acts of crossing. Clarke’s narratives of crossing detail the geographic movement of the diaspora alongside the crossing of identity and meanings that emerge from diasporic life. Clarke’s texts are, like Brand’s, transgressive towards
both received notions of blackness and Canadian-ness, exceeding both categories and forcing
them into a troubled dialogue with one another.

In Chapter Four I move from fiction to history and from the semiotic to the discursive in
my analysis of the political controversies surrounding the death of Albert Johnson at the hands of
two Toronto police officers in 1978. Johnson’s death became a major rallying point for black
people in Toronto and across Canada. Brand’s *thirsty* is based on Johnson’s death, it functions as a
catalyst in Neil Bissoondath’s *The Innocence of Age* (1992) and Austin Clarke refers to Johnson
throughout his corpus. In the first section of this chapter I analyze the representation of Johnson
in mainstream and black community newspapers using Henry’s and Tator’s (2002) model for
analyzing race in Canadian media. I show how Johnson, and the black, Caribbean community
more generally, are misrepresented in this discourse and argue that Brand’s, Clarke’s and
Bissoondath’s rewriting of Johnson’s death resists that misrepresentation. This blackening of
Canadian history explicitly links the poetics and politics of these writers in an effort to intervene
in the public sphere and to alter the meaning of blackness in the Canadian imaginary.

In Chapter Five I engage with Tessa McWatt’s *Out of My Skin*, focusing on the politics of
recognition and writing back that she delineates. McWatt is a member of an emerging field of a
new generation of black diasporic writers in Canada. While her novel could be placed in dialogue
with a range of other texts such as Esi Edugyan’s *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne* (2004), David
Chariandy’s *Soucouyant* (2007) and Suzette Mayr’s *Venous Hum* (2004), her novel eschews their
concern with the meaning of being black in a global and post-national Canada. Instead,
McWatt’s novel is a throwback to “worrying the nation” (Kertzer 1998), sharing as it does
Brand’s and Clarke’s investment in a multicultural nation rather than a dislocated politics of
diaspora. Further, her work historicizes multicultural politics, revealing the continuities between
Canadian multiculturalism and past political forms for managing difference. Her intriguing coalition with Aboriginal and Québécois claims to sovereignty distinguishes Out of My Skin from its transnational brethren, placing it squarely within a strategic reinvention of the historical pasts of Canadian nationality.

Each author’s response to Du Bois’s question “How does it feel to be a problem?” is simultaneously a response to Frantz Fanon’s call to write “a new history of Man” (Wretched 238) and an illustration of blackening as the process, in Cho’s sense, of becoming diasporic rather than of being defined in advance of acts, inscriptions, and practices. I aim to show a discernible development in each writer’s inscription of blackening particularly as each responds to this repeated question of “where’re you really from?” The continuous staging of this question posed to black people in Canada reveals not only a concern with the continuous absenting and “invisible visibility” of black people in Canada but also a concern with the manner in which Canada is imagined. Each author’s project of blackening queries, rewrites and intervenes in the nation from this transgressive, doubly-conscious position of the black diaspora in Canada. Brand’s inscription of diasporic time within national temporality and Clarke’s insertion of the themes of crossing and mobility into settled versions of nation transform Canada into a diasporic space, challenging its whiteness. Similarly, their writing of the history of Albert Johnson engages in a blackening of Canadian history that counteracts the marginalization and invisibility of historical black Canadian presences. These authors transform the interrogation of blackness in Canada into an interrogation of Canadian multiculturalism and the Canadian state. They employ the position of the hyphen to open up new avenues of critique and citizenship that respond to the abjection of blackness from the nation and foreground the continuing importance of race. While their depiction of black people in the nation is “inflected with both absence and presence” (McKittrick, “Their Blood”27)
their narratives transform black absence into a transgressive form of presence that re-writes the nation from a black perspective. Clarke and Brand trespass upon and transgress the borders of nation whereas McWatt's version of blackening seeks both to undermine national boundaries and to carve a place within the nation. Daphne at once historicizes Canadian difference and, in doing so, claims Canada as a black space in ways that are not possible for the figures in Brand’s and Clarke’s texts. Blackening, for Daphne, is less a process of becoming diasporic and more a process of blackening the nation, suggesting that it is through the querying and transgressing of notions of Canada as whiteness that black presences can be expressed in the nation. In their responses to the question, “How does it feel to be a problem?” these writers not only reveal the strategies of improvisation, crossing, and transgression that mark black diasporic life in Canada but also show how the “problem” is a Canadian problem with which the nation must contend.

Methodological Note: Texts and Contexts

This introduction models the critical methodology that I employ throughout this project. This is a critical reading practice that attends to both the poetics of the texts that I consider as well as their politics. By explicating acts of blackening through close reading of newspapers, novels, poems and critical essays, I aim to show the continuity between the aesthetic and the political concerns of the authors in this study. As Walcott and Cho reveal, the political contours of black diasporic writing cannot be isolated from their formal expression.

I have postponed my reading of the political content of these writers’ acts of blackening to later chapters and initially focus on their techniques of representation and mediation. I aim to show that Brand’s and Clarke’s blackening must be read both in terms of their aesthetic achievements and the manner in which those aesthetics do not merely shape but are integral to
their explicit political concerns. In Stuart Hall’s terms I aim to show the continuity between the “semiotic” and “discursive” aspects of blackening in these texts where “the semiotic approach is concerned with the how of representation … what has been called its ‘poetics’; … [and] the discursive approach is more concerned with the effects and consequences of representation – its ‘politics’” (Representations 6; italics in original). In this respect I agree with George Elliott Clarke when he criticizes scholars who focus only on the discursive aspect of black diasporic cultural production “without paying [black authors] the compliment of examining all aspects of their poetics” (“Three Authors” 178); who, in other words, simply mine these texts for evidence of progressive politics. My readings, on the contrary, demonstrate how politics is an effect of poetics. I hope to work against the sociological criticism of black writing that George Elliott Clarke critiques by demonstrating how the political and formal concerns of these writers are inextricable from one another.

The importance of poetics in shaping Brand and Clarke’s politics is evident in both their fiction and their critical essays. Even when Brand and Clarke write specifically non-fictional, political essays, they do so in a poetic fashion. Brand’s A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging and Clarke’s political essays in Contrast (which I discuss in Chapter Four) (1979) are written in a hybrid, poetic-prosaic form. This suggests that neither of them is in the business of producing political pamphlets or mere propaganda. Indeed, for a poet or author, blackening is as much about rewriting poetics as it is about intervening in politics.

I argue in Chapter Two that Dionne Brand’s experiments in temporality give content to her conception of diasporic double-consciousness as a kind of postponement and delay. I also argue that Brand’s long poetry constitutes a blackening of the genre of the contemporary Canadian long poem. Yet in my reading of Brand’s thirsty, I engage in a postponement and delay
of my own as I minimize my discussion of the poem’s explicit political concerns and focus primarily on its formal features. In one sense this mirrors the content of the poem itself as there is a strange tension in thirsty between the calmness of the speaker, the poem’s temporalities of prolongation and delay, and the burning political questions and sense of grave injustice that Brand details in the poem. What kind of politics emerges from the relationship between the speaker’s outrage and her calm, careful tone in the poem? My reading of thirsty mirrors Brand’s poetic temporality, as I delay my discussion of the poem’s political content until Chapter Four. Similarly, in Chapter Three, I postpone my reading of the political content of Austin Clarke’s work to focus on his depiction of movement and (im)mobility as endemic to the experience of black diasporic subjectivity.

In my fourth chapter I return to Clarke’s and Brand’s works, focusing on both writers’ explicit political concerns through my analysis of the public figure of Albert Johnson and of the way in which Johnson is an exemplary embodiment of devalued and disfigured blackness. Brand’s thirsty and Clarke’s More (as well as many of his other texts) describe the events of Albert Johnson’s death at the hands of the Toronto police and critique the depiction, in the mainstream Canadian press, of Johnson as a stereotype of black, male Jamaican criminality. In Chapter Four I consider the mainstream media depictions of Johnson and argue that this depiction relies on a particular conception of whiteness as civil and blackness as criminal and problematic. I read this depiction against Brand’s, Clarke’s and Neil Bissoondath’s narration of Johnson’s life to argue that they write Johnson’s life and death not only to ensure his place in Canadian history but also to resist the typology of criminality that inf(1)ects “blackness.” Idora, in Clarke’s More, for instance, recalls how seeing black people depicted as criminals in newspapers “made her feel guilty, inferior, sorry to be so visible and to have her situation so often smeared in big headlines
and colour photographs on the front page of the *Star*” (109-110; italics in original). Clarke’s texts reveal how the visibility of black people in the media renders black people invisible beyond the logic of the stereotype. Brand and Clarke seek to transfigure “smearing” into “blackening,” first to prevent Johnson being killed and tried twice, and second to hold the Canadian media and “white fear” responsible for the failures of multiculturalism. Their commemoration of Johnson is also an indictment of the failure of empathy so evident in the media coverage that sought to convict Johnson because he was black and to exonerate the police because they were white.

In Chapter Four I end the postponement of politics and discuss how these acts of blackening inflect the Canadian public sphere and insist on the presence of black voices within it. Using Henry and Tator’s model of “democratic racism” (38) and Michael K. Brown’s (2003) analysis of “racial realist” (7) discourse, I show how the politics of blackening challenges the “smeared” representation of black people in the Canadian public sphere.

This structure of delay enables me to engage in a contrapuntal move which re-reads texts that I have considered in earlier chapters and also serves as a counterpoint to the sociological readings of which George Elliott Clarke is so critical. For Clarke and Brand, blackening is about remapping Canadian literary and political landscapes. Misrepresentation and smearing occur in both literary and political realms in the form of marginalization, silencing or tokenization of black Canadian writers. In this respect, I argue that giving full critical attention to their poetics and their blackening of genre, motif and trope becomes a means of reading their politics. As such, the structure and order of these chapters enable me to engage these acts of blackening in the multiple sites in which they are located and to reveal the continuity between literary form and political strategy.
Chapter 2: Temporalities of Becoming in Dionne Brand’s *thirsty*

Something must happen, something bound to come. They were waiting, after waiting for crop and pay, after waiting for cousin and auntie, after waiting for patience and grace, they were waiting for god

-Dionne Brand, *Map To The Door of No Return* 21

The vision of progress is the rational madness of history seen as sequential time, of a dominated future.

-Derek Walcott “The Muse of History” 357

Dionne Brand’s writing transforms the everyday acts of “waiting for crop and pay … for cousin and auntie” into a more transcendent expression of “waiting for patience and grace.” Brand’s poetry makes the seemingly inconsequential and disconnected events of black diasporic life resonate with the legacy of diasporic dislocation, the unspeakable traumas of slavery and the lost origins of the Middle Passage. Her work not only contextualizes the quotidian within the black diaspora, but also constitutes a language for these unspoken traumas, longings and absented histories. As such, Brand’s poetics indicates how any project of blackening must contend with the inexpressible losses, historical fissures and absent presences of the black diaspora. Brand reveals how “the various inscriptions with which black people … contest and resist subordination and domination” (Walcott, *Black Like Who* 125) are inflected by the irrecoverable history and lost identities of the Middle Passage and the absented-presence of the door of no return. Furthermore, Brand’s depiction of the everyday employs memory and narrative to intervene in and counter the history that has produced those very absences and silences. What is distinct about Brand’s poetics of the quotidian is that she does not attempt to restore or fill in the fissures and lacunae of the
Middle Passage, slavery and the black diaspora. Rather, she makes those absences palpable and material, depicting them as part of the very substrate of black diasporic life. Brand’s depiction of the quotidian carefully traces the paradoxical and troubling ways in which the absences of black diasporic life make themselves epistemologically and temporally present. History reads those losses and absences as black silence and powerlessness, but Brand’s poetry rewrites those absences as containing the conditions of possibility for new subjectivities. Her poetry rewrites the temporality of absence and mourning as a temporality of “waiting” for “something bound to come.” This temporal shift in Brand’s work constitutes an act of blackening whereby her poetics stand as a counter-narrative to modernity and history. If official historical discourse has, for black diasporic people, “made the past a mystery, unknown and unspeakable” (Hartman 14) such that “Dispossession was our history” (Hartman 74), Brand rewrites absence as not strictly dispossession but also as the condition of possibility for new conceptions of black diasporic subjectivity. Waiting, patience, and grace make diasporic temporality both sustained and unpredictable, because the gift of grace is always untimely, interrupting the monotony of national temporality. This monotony, however, is transfigured by the faith and patience of those who wait. As such, Brand’s depiction of the quotidian rewrites that history of unspeakable losses and absences in terms that make it possible for black people to challenge their historical silencing.

Saidiya Hartman witnesses this absence and historical silencing firsthand when she visits a market in Elmina, Ghana where hundreds of thousands of black people were sold as slaves: “I would have preferred mourners with disheartened faces and bowed heads and the pallor of sadness coloring the town. Or at least something Gothic: bloodstained ruins, human skulls scattered like cobblestones … Instead I found myself immersed in the prosaic conduct of everyday life – the petty negotiations, squabbles, and contested transactions” (50). The “terrible
beauty” (50) of this everyday scene is underwritten by the absence of any acknowledgment of the historical significance of the place and its importance to Hartman’s own lack of origins. Hartman returns to Africa to find only the absence of any trace of her own history or mark of the trauma that has constituted her place in the black diaspora. Further, and perhaps more terrifying, she realizes that the great trauma of slavery and the Middle Passage was, in fact, everyday life for hundreds of thousands of people. In place of the grand historical narratives of oppression, resistance, rebellion and freedom, Hartman finds an everyday life that bears no marks of her history. Hartman’s observations of the market reveal the persistent absences of the black diaspora and the manner in which those absences permeate quotidian life. Like Hartman, Henry Louis Gates Jr. goes to Africa to understand the legacy of the door of no return in black diasporic life. In *A Map To The Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (2002) Brand describes her reaction to watching Henry Louis Gates Jr. interview a man in Kumasi, Ghana about the slave trade:

> I expect an intelligent, dispassionate discussion about the geopolitics of the time. Suddenly a plaintive and childish question from Henry Louis Gates: to paraphrase, ‘Why did you sell us?’ The Kumasic man of course has no answer. ... Gates, a usually sophisticated erudite, is completely genuine, Gates picks up after centuries as if they had spoken only days or months or even just a few years ago ... ‘Why did you sell us?’ I switch the station, ... There is no answer. The Door of No Return is ajar between them. I can see its impossibility. (31 – 2)

Gates’s fantasy of return and recovering origins renders impossible any “intelligent, dispassionate discussion” because he feels the wounds of slavery and the Middle Passage as though they happened “only days or months or even just a few years ago.” Gates and Hartman literally return to Africa to interrogate descendants of possible slave traders, while Brand is “embarrassed at the
question and the answer.” Gates hopes to heal old wounds by asking questions for which there are no answers; Brand suggests instead that the inheritance of slavery and the history of the Middle Passage cannot be cast off but can be rewritten and “mis-remembered” in ways that enable the conditions of possibility for a different conception of black diasporic subjectivity.

Unlike Hartman, Gates and many other black diasporic writers who have detailed the traumas of living without a history and of the quotidian haunted by the lacunae and absences of the past, Brand writes black diasporic subjects caught between this haunting of the past and the possibilities of making new subjectivities in the future. Her description of black diasporic life as “a fiction” (Map 18) anticipates Hartman’s narrating of the market scene and the manner in which Hartman tries to locate the absences and losses of her past in the quotidian. Brand argues that black diasporic life is akin to “a fiction” whereby one tries to “apprehend the sign one makes yet [is] unable to escape it except in radiant moments of ordinariness made like art” (Map 18 – 19). Hartman’s depiction of the quotidian tries to render lost history and trauma present; however, Brand’s poetics of the everyday rewrites the patience, longing and grace that she observes in the diaspora as a hopeful expression of life that can transcend the haunting traumas of the past. It is through poetry and fiction that Brand eschews this desire to interrogate and recover the past, writing instead the complicated flux of absence and presence that constitutes black diasporic life in interstitial spaces and temporalities. Brand shifts the temporality of the black diaspora from a “backward looking conception of diaspora,” forever haunted by the “endless desire to return to ‘lost origins,’” (Hall, “Cultural Identity”245) to a temporality of becoming.

Brand’s corpus repeatedly returns to a central question, “How to describe this mix of utter, hopeless pain and elation leaning against the door” (Map 41)? Brand explains the difficulty of occupying and writing the space of the door thus: “To live at the Door of No Return is to live
self-consciously. To be always aware of your presence as a presence outside of yourself ... we exist doubly. An ordinary conversation is never an ordinary conversation. One cannot say the simplest thing without doubling or being doubled for the image that emerged from the doorway” (Map 49 - 50). The doubleness that Brand identifies is the doubleness of being spoken for, predetermined, of occupying a history that is not wholly your own and of being “torn by the ambivalence of mourning losses that are both your own and yet not quite your own” (Cho 21). In Spillers’s terms this doubleness represents a “locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the [inter]national treasury of rhetorical wealth” (“Mama’s Baby” 65). Spillers attempts to navigate this “national treasury of rhetorical wealth” in order to enable the “agent buried beneath … to come clean” (“Mama’s Baby”65).I argue that Brand’s poetics struggle for a similar language of diasporic double consciousness that does not treat diasporic life as only riddled with loss and trauma. Brand locates this doubleness within the quotidian partially to find a language for this everyday doubleness, these unspoken yearnings and ambivalences and this tearing between the door of the past and the doorways of possible transcendence in the future. Yet, Brand’s poetic depiction of the quotidian also enables her to engage in a blackening of history and identity, rewriting the confounding and privation of identity as a space of expression and agency for black diasporic subjects. She explains that she is “scouring maps of all kinds, the way that some fictions do, discursively, elliptically, trying to locate their own transferred selves” (Map 18 – 19). The absences and gaps of an elliptical and fictional life are rewritten in Brand’s work as the conditions of possibility for black, diasporic “transferred selves.” These are the selves that are not located here or now but that have been transferred across space and time such that “all names were forgotten” and their dislocation “signified the end of traceable beginnings” (Brand, Map 5).
The presence of the door and the struggle to rewrite historical absence as an expression of “transferred selves” appear as early as *In Another Place, Not Here* (1996) and *Land to Light On* (1997). The structural presence of absence is evident in the title of *In Another Place, Not Here* and this novel begins with the protagonist, Elizete, saying “Grace. Is Grace, yes” (3). “Grace” functions in the novel as it does in the epigraph to this chapter, as a catch-all phrase for the inexpressible absences and longings of black diasporic life. Finding a language for that absence and a form in which to render that absence somehow present and material is one of the central themes of Brand’s work. These early texts, along with Brand’s later work such as *Inventory* (2006) and *Ossuaries* (2010) are decidedly transnational. Brand’s *thirsty*, however, specifically locates these absences and lacunae within Canada, putting them in tension with Canadian narrations of nation. The poem’s sustaining metaphor of thirst inserts diasporic absence into the dream of nation. *thirsty* not only historicizes Canadian diversity but also disputes the notion of identity that Canadian multiculturalism claims to “recognize and preserve.” While the longing for origins is often expressed as the absence of nation for black people, Brand rewrites the absence of origins, nation and home as the possibilities of living as a transferred self, never wholly here nor there but always in a position of betweenness. She posits the ongoing experience of transference against the logic of origins, belonging and arrival to show how the absences and abjections of the black diaspora push at the borders of the nation. Her inscription of the quotidian constitutes an act of blackening that rewrites the historical deprivation of black diasporic people such that the “elliptical” sense of absence is palpable and, paradoxically, becomes part of the content of black diasporic life. In *thirsty* Brand converts the paralysis of the backward-gazing diasporic subject, eclipsed by the absences of the past, into a subject that is longing for the future.
Brand’s writing went largely unremarked upon within both popular and academic presses until the release of *No Language Is Neutral* (1990) and its nomination for the Governor General’s award. The release of *No Language Is Neutral* effectively moved Brand’s writing from the margins of the Canadian literary canon to its centre. The earliest criticism on Brand is often marked by an attempt to align Brand’s work with immigrant Canadian writing. Early critical readings of Brand’s work such as John Clement Ball’s “White City, Black Ancestry: The Immigrant’s Toronto in the Stories of Austin Clarke and Dionne Brand” (1994), for instance, treats Brand as representative of black and immigrant writing that disrupts the Canadian national imaginary. This focus on the manner in which Brand gives voice to a black immigrant experience in Canada often comes at the expense of critical attention to her poetics. This continues in recent critical attempts to mine her poetry and prose (typically the latter) for textual embodiments of “Affective citizenship” (Brydon), “territorialized cosmopolitan subjectivities” (Johansen), “deterritorialization” (Dobson), “politics of ambivalence” (Forster) and “collective dynamics” (McCallum and Olbey), for, in short, alternative forms of citizenship, mobility, and political organization. The political consequentiality, they discern, however, tends to transcend her poetics rather than emerge organically from it. I contend that Brand’s poetics often unsettles and nuances her political claims, both tempering the anger for which she is often vilified and making it burn more intensely. The manner in which Brand’s poetics reshapes the thematic tendencies that these critics identify, rather than simply exemplifying or illustrating them, is often absent from their critical interpretations. Brand’s project of blackening operates simultaneously at the levels of politics and poetics and I suggest that critics must read her political claims alongside her claims about genre and form.
The limitations and problems of Brand criticism have been addressed by George Elliott Clarke in his article “Harris, Philip, Brand: Three Authors in Search of Literate Criticism” (2000) in which he asserts, “Bluntly, much of the criticism of [Claire] Harris, [Marlene Nourbese] Philip and Brand is irrelevant” because it elevates these authors “to triumvirate status without paying them the compliment of examining all aspects of their poetics” (178). Clarke’s central argument is that critics of these authors “either reduce the writers to the status of sociologists or they bleach their work of aesthetic value. The resultant criticism is tedious, inadequate, and – perhaps – insidious” (164). The obvious pun on bleaching suggests that Clarke sees white liberal Canadian guilt operating in the critical assessment of those critics who praise the work of these authors without a thorough assessment of their poetic merits. Clarke’s unapologetic critique is largely aimed at the sociological readings of Brand’s work that praise her politics and have virtually nothing to say about her poetic achievements. He is also critical of scholars who turn Brand or Philip into metonyms for African-Canadian writing and ignore the long history of black writing in Canada. Clarke further clarifies his position in a later interview, explaining, “We can’t just take a handful of texts and say, ‘They are written by Black people, therefore they are against racism.’ They might be, but that’s not enough. I am tired of reading reviews simply saying Dionne Brand is against racism and homophobia, Marlene Nourbese Philip is against sexism and regionalism … I am sick of that! How does such criticism advance us” (Dominguez 2001)? Clarke’s comments are certainly correct and the tedious, if not “insidious,” aspect of Brand criticism is apparent both in white, liberal praise of Brand’s work and in the conservative rejection of Brand’s work on the grounds that her poetry is too pessimistic or political. As Clarke suggests, this criticism has little

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14 Louise Fabiani’s review of Land To Light On (1997) is exemplary of this kind of review, complaining that the speaker’s “choleric voice is full of anger and anger’s sorry cousin, self-pity… Brand alienates by
to say about Brand’s poetics and is primarily interested in the sociological and political qualities of her work.

If there is one recurring theme throughout contemporary Brand criticism it is the attention to Brand’s concern with cultural difference, otherness, and the instability of categories of identity. The challenges posed by Brand’s texts to stable conceptions of race, gender, sex or nationality have become a major point of interest in Brand criticism and one of the major appeals of Brand’s writing has been its capacity to conceive of identity in an anti-essentialist manner. Clarke’s criticism of the tedious and sociological qualities of much Brand criticism is true of these critics who analyze the representation of difference, otherness, and hyphenated identities in Brand’s work. For instance, Heather Smyth’s argument that “Brand offers an urban, cosmopolitan vision of a politics of difference that transcends the limits of multicultural discourse” (272) is typical of this kind of sociological reading which celebrates a vague sense of difference yet has little to say about Brand’s formal poetics.15 Emily Johansen argues that in Brand’s *What We All Long For* (2005), “the identity of diasporic characters … continually oscillates between belonging and non-belonging” and “members of diasporic communities … must move between different social, ethnic, and gendered areas in the city. These material places are sites of complex social relationships which offer varying and unstable levels of permeability based on class, gender, ethnicity, and a host of other axes of identification” (48) Johansen’s focus on plot, her valorization of identities that “continually oscillate between belonging and non-belonging,” her resort to axes of identification without content and her ignoring of poetics is exemplary of this

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15 In a review of *What We All Long For* that reads like a perfect parody of this scholarship, Evelyn C. White claims that “*What We All Long For* is an ambitious novel weakened by a surplus of weak characters. Still, it stands as a worthy contribution to the rising chorus of ethnic voices in Canadian literature who are proudly singing, ‘We Shall Overcome’” (184).
kind of sociological reading of difference in Brand's work. Johansen's contention that characters "continually oscillate between belonging and non-belonging" treats this oscillation as an existential condition rather than as historically produced, effacing distinctions between different diasporic subjects. The transatlantic journey, in Brand's imagery, can be felt even in Carla's gait, thus making it possible to explain how diasporic subjects come to inhabit their bodies in the way they do. Carla, for instance, is described as “slipping through the city on light” (30) and as “liquid and jittery and out of control” (101). Oscillation is quite different from slipping and jitteriness; this failure to attend to poetics means that Johansen does not relay the story Brand tells.

Charlotte Sturgess also focuses on Brand’s depiction of difference and betweenness but links those concerns to Brand’s poetics, arguing that “Brand’s prose is interstitial, shifting on borders of meaning and concerned with the problem of finding voice as a racially and sexually inscribed Other” (203). Sturgess’s claim, that Brand’s work is “concerned with the problem of finding voice as a racially and sexually inscribed Other” summarizes a great deal of Brand criticism.16 These critics celebrate difference, interstitiality and betweenness without showing how they are effects of Brand’s poetics and how “the problem of finding voice” must contend with the inexpressible losses and absences of the black diaspora. Diana Brydon’s “Dionne Brand’s Global Intimacies: Practising Affective Citizenship” (2007) argues that Brand’s Inventory “may be read as performing an affective citizenship that calls her readers to do the same” (1001-2). Brydon’s argument would be enriched by attending to the poem’s repeated combination of S and SH sounds as in “the sunset in Cheyenne” (3) and in the repetition of words like “sugars” (33), “glacial” (4) and “surreptitious” (3). These S and SH sounds mimic the "irregular susurrus" (49) of the world, evoking in sound what words cannot communicate. Brydon intuits Brand's intimate

and affective conception of citizenship, but abstracts this intuition from its performance in conspiratorial, clandestine, and whispering sounds.

The other major strand of Brand criticism focuses on her interpretation of history and memory and the manner in which the figures in her texts are constructed through fraught acts of remembering. Erica L. Johnson describes this as “Brand’s project … of ‘unforgetting!’” which “addresses the extent to which the histories and individual stories of African diasporic experience have been stricken from the historical record” (1 - 2). Johnson and others consider the undeniable importance of memory, loss, and trauma in Brand’s work and the manner in which unforgetting, indicating both the desire to remember and an irrecoverable, erased history, infuses her texts. If the first group of critics is concerned with questions of identity and otherness as they are structured by contemporary conditions of globalization, multiculturalism and diaspora, the second group sees the subject born out of a complicated relationship with the history of slavery, modernity, and the nation. This latter group of critics argues that Brand conceives of a poetic counter-memory to the narratives of the nation and of modernity.  

Johnson addresses the “extent to which the histories and individual stories of African diasporic experience have been stricken from the historical record” but does not show how that striking is rendered visible and material in Brand’s work. As such, I argue that the majority of critics from both groups are guilty of what Clarke describes as the sociological reading of Brand’s work which focuses primarily on plot and has little to say about the manner in which Brand’s politics is shaped by her poetics.  

18 Brand’s work is also inadequately contextualized within the fields of Caribbean poetry or black diasporic writing. Indeed, within these fields, Brand’s work is typically marginalized or ignored outright. In numerous analyses of “Caribbean Women’s Writing,” Brand’s work is often seen as falling outside the critical or generic paradigms that constitute Caribbean writing or black diasporic writing. The organizers of the first International Conference of Caribbean Women Writers did not include Brand’s contribution to the conference, “Madam Alaird’s Breasts,” or her critical response to the conference, “This Body for Itself,” in
While there are an increasing number of critical articles that engage some aspect of Brand’s work, there has been little attempt to offer a sustained critical framework for reading her poetry or prose. Such a critical framework must show how Brand’s politics emerges from rather than is simply reflected in her poetics, particularly the manner in which Brand’s poetic rendering of the absences of black diasporic life opens up spaces to articulate new political subjectivities. I begin with an overview of the limitations of extant criticism and with the recurrence of what Clarke has identified as the sociological trend in Brand criticism to identify the aporias in Brand scholarship. I argue that Brand’s poetics modify her politics such that any sociological reading of her work will produce flat and prescriptive descriptions of otherness and miss the intricate intersections between Brand’s poetics and politics. Brand’s poetic meditation on the absences of black diasporic life, signified by the metaphor of the Door of No Return, inflects her political considerations as she attempts to re-imagine those absences and losses as the necessary conditions for new forms of political subjectivity. I argue that these critics miss the important ways that Brand’s poetics struggles to render absence present. Silences, erasures and lacunae are

denise deCaires Narain’s Contemporary Caribbean Women’s Poetry: Making Style (2002) creates a critical framework of structural, thematic and generic “in-betweenness” that “offers a suitable model for the reading of Caribbean women’s writing” (244). Despite the inclusion of other Caribbean women poets in diaspora (Grace Nichols) and Canada (Marlene Nourbese Philip), Narain’s only discussion of Brand occurs at the very conclusion of her text where she briefly addresses Brand’s exclusion from the published collection of the Conference of Caribbean Women Writers. Brand is mentioned at the very end of the final chapter, “Playing the field: anthologizing, canonizing and problematizing Caribbean women’s writing” and Narain invokes Brand when she gestures towards “problematizing” the field of “Contemporary Caribbean Women’s Poetry” (213) that she has outlined in her argument. Narain’s argument, that Caribbean Women’s poetry is marked by an “indeterminacy of all kinds of identities, whether of geography, culture, race, class, sexuality or gender,” (244) seems particularly attuned to Brand’s work yet Brand is noticeably absent from Narain’s analysis. Indeed, the relegation of Brand to the very end of the text suggests that Brand’s indeterminacy is somehow too indeterminate for Narain’s framework. In another context, Peter Dickinson’s Here is Queer: Nationalisms, Sexualities, and the Literatures of Canada (1999) includes a very brief chapter on Brand’s In Another Place, Not Here (1997) which primarily discusses Brand’s ill fit within the field of queer Canadian writing. Dickinson vaguely insists that “a more fluid definition of the ‘politics of location’ is required before beginning any study of Brand’s work” (157).
are depicted along a continuum of absence and presence. Her project of blackening shows how
everyday diasporic life continues to be shaped by the inarticulable elements of the black diaspora.
While Brand’s work contends with the political effects of the absences of black diasporic life,
poetry and fiction provide her with a means of expressing these longings and of making absences
material. Tuyen, in What We All Long For, describes “that anomalous void in her life” (26),
stressing the inarticulable loss that her family suffered in their migration to Canada. Marie Ursule
in At The Full And Change of the Moon (1999) describes a repeated “haunting not-enough
feeling” (1) that permeates her everyday life. In A Map to the Door of No Return Brand argues
that “The door exists as an absence” and “Every gesture our bodies make somehow gestures
toward this door” (25). Brand’s poetry and prose depict these “elliptical ... transferred selves,”
longing for moments of “grace.” In this chapter I show how Brand rewrites the absences and
aporias of the black diaspora to imagine new modes of black diasporic subjectivity that challenge
the abjection of black people from the nation.

Brand’s critical essays, too, do not employ scholarly or critical prose but are written in a
hybrid poetic-prosaic form. Maia Joseph describes Brand’s Map as an “elliptical, poetic
meditation” (75) while George Elliott Clarke is critical of Brand’s use (in Map) of “glittering,
dreamy prose, also occasionally incisively intellectual, to bespeak unplumbed confusions about
identity and belonging” (Review of A Map 557).19 Yet it is precisely Brand’s elliptical, dreamy,
and glittering style that provides her with a means of expressing the inarticulable, of giving

19 Clarke argues that “The essential trouble here is that Brand writes out of willful hypocrisy: she skewers
the ‘romantic’ nationalisms ... but Brand never queries her own essentialist posture, namely, that all black
people ... are disturbed, disfigured – by the experience of slavery and thus yearn for some form of re-
collection” (Review 557; italics in original). Clarke’s review unfairly suggests that Brand insists that all
black people are “disfigured – by the experience of slavery.” Rather Brand suggests that the losses and
absences of slavery and the Middle Passage continue to inflect everyday black diasporic life. She does not
insist that all black people “yearn for ... re-collection” but rather writes a grammar to express the absences,
longing and yearning that she observes in the diaspora.
meaning to the silent postures, affectations and gestures of black diasporic subjectivity. In *thirsty*,  
the organizing metaphor of thirst expresses the sense of unspoken longing observed by the  
speaker of the poem. In an earlier essay, “Water More Than Flour” (1994), Brand investigates the  
meaning of the titular phrase as it gives resonance to a deep sense of absence and otherwise  
unspoken longing. As Brand explains, “water more than flour, to describe not only the physical  
but the spiritual state of want, meaning a thinness to life’s possibilities, unerring hard times, an  
absence of joy, an absence of redemption or mercy or rescue” (124). Brand’s repetition of the  
phrase throughout the essay accomplishes more than simply elevating the phrase to talismanic  
status or documenting a popular childhood idiom. Rather, her analysis of the polyvalence of the  
phrase shows the unlikelihood of material change compensated for with words. Language can fill  
in material absence and provide not only an expression of the desire for change but also agency  
and voice in the face of material deprivation. Brand’s essay makes a surprising turn from longing  
for the material plenty of flour to focusing on language as a kind of liquidity that can speak to  
spiritual and material absence and rewrite the “thinness of life’s possibilities.” Brand writes,  
“Water more than flour was their way of finding some grace, the grace of a phrase, in the hunger,  
in the starkness, in the bareness in which we seemed destined to abide” (124). Her repetition of  
the phrase re-images the want for “flour” as part of a desire for a radical change in the  
conditions of everyday life. Furthermore, the words “abide” and “grace” suggest again the  
intersection of the ordinary and the poetic, particularly as Brand attempts to locate grace in this  
abiding. The essay suggests that if black diasporic people are “destined to abide” (abide derives  
from the Old English word ābīdan, meaning “to wait” (“abide”)) then poetics and the grace of a  
phrase can render their absences and longings material so that the abiding itself becomes the  
respite Brand seeks.
The “Door of No Return” provides a metaphor for the lacunae and irrecoverable origins of the black diaspora as well as for the recurring desire to recover those origins, to step back through the door to the ‘before’ of diaspora. The Door of No Return is the actual place that black people stepped through and entered the Middle Passage as well as a metaphor for the loss of origins, identity and subjectivity that resulted from slavery. Saidiya Hartman has shown that to return to the site of the door does not mark a return to origins but rather relives the traumas of that dislocation and that dissolved identity. In Africa Hartman realizes, “I represented what most chose to avoid: the catastrophe that was our past” (4). She finds that despite her struggle to return, “None of it had brought me any closer to replacing a lacuna with a name or an X-ed space with an ancestral village” (79). Hartman discovers what Brand already knows: that the Door of No Return “looms both as a horror and a romance … The horror is of course three or four hundred years of slavery, its shadow was and is colonialism and racism. The romance is of the place beyond the door, the Africa of our origins” (Map 22). The door of no return is not simply a metaphor for the ghost of history but also for the irrecoverable origins of the black diaspora. The door is the site where the transatlantic economy of slavery was enacted and marks a loss that cannot be recovered. Despite the romance of the door and the false prospect of recovery and return that it offers, Brand is at once fascinated by the haunting power of the door and also the fictions that conceive of it as a site of origins. Whether figured as horror or romance, Brand repeatedly stresses “Too much has been made of origins” (64). She argues, 

some of us want entry into the home and nation that are signified by these romances. Some of us in the Diaspora long so for nation – some continuous thread of biological or communal association, some bloodline or legacy which will cement our rights in the place we live. The problem of course is that even if those existed – and they certainly do,
even if it is in the human contraband which we represent in the romance – they do not guarantee nation for Blacks in the Diaspora. (67)

Despite her disavowal of origins, Brand is aware that the romance and promise of stepping through the door and ‘returning’ or ‘departing’ from diaspora persists and Brand’s poetics “describe[s] this mix of utter, hopeless pain and elation leaning against the door” (41). The image of the diasporic subject “leaning against the door” suggests the absented presence of the door that Brand sees in black, diasporic life, forever haunted by the prospect of returning but forever finding that return to origins is in fact a return to the trauma of absence and losing one’s origins and not a return to the “romance” of the past. Brand makes this explicit when she writes, “The door exists as an absence. ... Every gesture our bodies make somehow gestures toward this door.

What interests me primarily is probing the Door of No Return as consciousness. The door casts a haunting spell on personal and collective consciousness in the Diaspora” (25). If the door ties individual black people to a diasporic community, Brand aims to rewrite this process of becoming diasporic. Her work reinterprets the meaning of the door to foreground not the recovery of lost origins, stable identity or belonging but rather the desiring and longing for identity and nation as a hopeful gesture for change that is signified in the longing for the door.

The door offers an image for what Stuart Hall describes as the “backward looking conception of diaspora … [that] gives rise to a certain imaginary plenitude, recreating the endless desire to return to ‘lost origins,’ … to go back to the beginning” (Hall, “Cultural Identity”245). Brand’s double-consciousness does not depict the diasporic subject torn asunder by the contradiction between pain and elation but as containing both in the act of leaning against the door of no return. Brand’s attention to posture and words is a poetic map of diasporic resilience, an acknowledgement of loss and an embrace of hope. It is not the door that Brand finds
compelling but rather the “imaginary plenitude” of the door and the “endless desire to return” that Brand identifies and abstracts as a language of longing and hope for black people in the diaspora. Brand is interested in the acts of longing expressed by the subjects “leaning against the door” that “gesture towards this door,” these embodied acts of desiring and longing that articulate, on their surface, a desire for origins, yet also, in their acts of longing, convey a desire for a more open sense of political possibility and transformation. In *thirsty*, Brand depicts the figures of the poem leaning against the door. The figures in the poem are personally haunted by the absences of the past yet these absences link them to a communal longing that constitutes the black diaspora.

Jody Mason elaborates Brand’s grammar of longing in her article “Searching for the Doorway: Dionne Brand’s *Thirsty*” where she discusses Brand’s creative reinterpretation of the door of no return in *Map* and *thirsty*. Mason argues that “the door functions as a trope for fixed forms, such as slavery and capitalism, that limit our ability to understand how past and present experience interact. Like the disabling aspect of the door of no return, the sundering of memory and history, these fixed forms cannot adequately account for the lived present” (784 – 5). Mason examines “how Brand engages with this [historical] reckoning through the trope of the opening doorway. The doorway is the enabling aspect of the door of no return … it is the site from which Brand conceives of another kind of world that holds the emergent possibility of seeing our ghosts and, ultimately, of social transformation” (785). Mason offers a useful vocabulary for considering both the disabling and enabling qualities of the door of no return. Yet Mason’s focus on tropes of haunting and historical reckoning limits the scope of her argument because she suggests that the rewriting of doors as doorways represents Brand’s “new optimism about the power of reckoning
with history, about the possibility of banishing ghosts” (787). Brand’s writing of the door/way is less a banishing of ghosts or reconciling with history than a means of expressing the unspoken longings and absences of diasporic double-consciousness. For Brand, “leaning against the door” evokes both the strain and fragility of the diasporic subject position. Nothing as complete or fulfilled as “banishing” or “reconciling” is possible for the subject in Brand’s imagination; the door (representing the past) is still a crutch, but the posture of leaning angles the body away from the door, thus hinting of the dream of the future. To use Brand’s own words, the “horror” of the past begets the “romance” of anticipation and desire rather than memory and yearning. In what follows I analyze Brand’s inscription of diasporic life in the inhospitable space of the nation. The “curiously complicated doubleness” of the door becomes the poetic means for providing a metaphor that both materializes and assuages the absences and longings of the diaspora. The door provides Brand with a metaphor for diasporic double-consciousness that displaces the centrality of nation in Du Bois’s formulation. Du Bois’s subject is torn between nation and race; Brand’s version of double-consciousness, however, practises a “deterritorialized strategy that is consciously aware of the ground of the nation from which it speaks” (Walcott, Black Like Who 15) but that locates the black diasporic subject between the horrors and absences of history and the possibilities of the future.

_Thirsty_ is a poem about memory and history. The multiple voices in the poem remember, honour, are haunted by, and attempt to forget the past. The poem’s organizing metaphor of thirst

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20 Mason’s argument about the haunting qualities of history needs to contend more effectively with Brand’s speaker’s claim in _Thirsty_ that what happens in the poem “isn’t a haunting. That would be too fabulous. / It happened and what happened, happened” (XXIX). My concern is that the language of haunting slips too easily into reading history and trauma in Brand’s texts through the frame of psychoanalysis, particularly the return of the repressed, which undermines the historical realities of slavery and colonialism. Furthermore, the language of trauma can relegate racism and racial thinking to a past which must be reckoned with rather than as aspects of the lives of Brand’s characters that appear in new and more virulent guises.
comes from the dying statement of the central character, Alan, after he is shot and killed by the Toronto police. Alan’s memory haunts the lives of his wife Julia, mother Chloe, and his unnamed daughter. Alan’s death, while important in its own right, is also emblematic of the manner in which the traumas and absences of the past determine black diasporic conceptions of present and future. Marlene Goldman points out “A key question posed by all of Brand’s recent texts concerns the course that individuals should plot in the aftermath of ‘the great disaster’” (3). While the disaster of Alan’s death is an important focalizing point in *thirsty* it is also a metonym for other great disasters and forced absences of slavery, the Middle Passage and racism. As Mason suggests, “The history of slavery and oppression forms a palimpsest over the specific, local history of the poem” (786) and these transnational histories are linked to the specific, local history of the black diaspora in Canada. While Goldman uses geographic and spatial metaphors to highlight the motif of drifting in Brand’s work, I shift the emphasis to what drifting might mean for Brand’s re-articulation of diasporic time. Diasporic subjectivity’s “romance with the past” provides an imaginative and political vocabulary for “what is / to come” (Brand, *thirsty* XX). In *thirsty*, Brand wants to honour the history of Albert Johnson (whom Alan’s narrative is based on) and his family as well as engage in a blackening of both Canadian history and poetics by not only inserting Johnson’s history into the annals of Canadian history, but by making Johnson’s fate that which casts a pall on them. This is one specific way that she challenges the “romance with the past” that she observes in both diaspora and nation. Furthermore, in her poetic meditation on longing, memory, history and desire in the black diaspora she makes these emotions crucial to the significance of one man’s story for the fate of black diasporic subjectivity. The poetic rendering of how Alan’s family members cope with and survive his death makes

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21 Mason points out that *thirsty* is inspired by the real case of Albert Johnson who was killed by the Toronto police in 1979.
individual experience representative of how black people in the diaspora cope with the loss of origins, homeland, the traumatic history of slavery and contemporary racism in Canada. The death of Albert Johnson and his family’s re-membering of his life haunts the personal and collective consciousness of diasporic subjects within the Canadian nation. The speaker links Chloe’s and Julia’s mourning of Alan to her broader observation that “Anyone, anyone can find themselves on a street corner / eclipsed, as they, by what deserted them” (XXVIII). While Chloe and Julia mourn and are “eclipsed” by Alan’s death, the speaker explains that he had “deserted them,” suggesting that absence is pervasive, extending beyond the immediate loss of Alan’s death. As such, _thirsty_ depicts double-consciousness temporally, positioning the black diasporic subject between a past that has “eclipsed” them and a future that never arrives. The speaker’s project to write this absence transforms the backward looking temporality of the door into an open temporality of becoming. Absence and longing become critical components of the means by which diasporic people imagine themselves anew.

_thirsty_ is a long poem composed of thirty three sections, written in a variety of stanzaic forms. The poem begins long after Alan has been shot dead by the Toronto police and traces how the women in his family remain haunted by his absence. The unnamed speaker of the poem intervenes in the historical silence that has erased Alan’s presence from the nation and silenced the women in the poem. The speaker is able to articulate that which remains inexpressible for the three women and render present what she detects in their gestures of longing and yearning for an unspoken loss. As such, the speaker recomposes Alan’s history and provides a language for his absence and for the lives of the women many years after his death. In the second stanza of the first section, the speaker states,

let me declare doorways,
corners, pursuit, let me say
standing here in eyelashes, in
invisible breasts, in the shrinking lake
in the tiny shops of untrue recollections,
the brittle, gnawed life we live,
I am held, and held (I)

In this opening section the speaker imagines her own place in the city in the act of historical recovery. The speaker is explicitly located within the poem as “standing here” and being “held, and held.” In the images of “invisible breasts,” the “shrinking lake” and the “brittle, gnawed life we live,” the speaker conceives of both the city and its subjects as decaying, vulnerable and fragile. Indeed, the next stanza describes “wrecked boys, half-dead hours … / inconclusive women in bruised dresses,” stressing the sense of brokenness and the fragility of the diasporic figures in the poem. All these images describe the temporality of decay which turns time into process and suspension. There is also a sense of betweenness, and the absence of beginnings and endings; these figures are caught in the between time of the diaspora. Furthermore, the description of the “tiny shops of untrue recollections” shares Lily Cho’s intuition of the process of becoming “diasporic through a complex process of memory and emergence.” The “untrue recollections” evoke the fictive and memorialized past of recovered absences which the speaker contests in her act of historical recovery. This is also evident in the speaker’s use of transferred epithets in the “half-dead hours,” suggesting that the “brittle, gnawed” quality of diasporic life has extended to time and memory itself. The numerous transferred epithets in this opening section all extend a pervasive sense of brokenness and vulnerability from individual subject to objects and spaces. These transferred epithets make the process and experience described a communal
one, turning affective and emotional experience into a relay. This is the kind of transfiguration of meaning that Lily Cho describes as the process by which one “becomes diasporic.” Furthermore, the use of transferred epithets suggests that diasporic subjectivity is generated in the cross-spatial and cross-cultural interactions of multiple geographies and politics. These transferred epithets locate diasporic subjectivity neither entirely here nor there but rather always elsewhere and in between.

This chronic displacement finds its complement in the poem’s emphasis on interstitial spaces and times, these “doorways,” “thresholds” and “crossroads,” on the speaker’s desire to write the history that will come out of the transferred meanings, absented presences and unlikely connections of the diaspora. Indeed, if diasporic subjects are always out of place wherever they are located, neither here nor there but located in between, in “inconclusive” places and times, then Brand expresses this interstitiality in her depiction of the diasporic subject suspended between the door and the doorway. The double meaning of “held” then becomes clear—both a moment of imprisonment and the implication of a communal “embrace” in the repetition of “I am held, and held.” The doorway represents the diasporic subject concerned more with there than here and with then than now and the site of the doorway expresses this in betweeness. The “complex process of memory and emergence” (21) whereby the past of the door no longer “looms both as a horror” of slavery, colonialism and racism nor as “a romance” with “the place beyond the door, the Africa of our origins” (Brand, Map 22) is captured when the speaker “declare[s] doorways.” Mason argues that the “speaker’s poetic project is to make doorways out of thresholds” and that “The doorway, then, is a multidirectional opening onto all that is not captured by … [the] formal limits” (795; italics in original) of the door. Brand conveys this multidirectionality through posture and gesture: “leaning against the door” and “gesturing towards the door.” Brand’s poetics
of the quotidian traces the presence of absented histories in these gestures and postures. Rather than permanent features of the diasporic condition, Brand turns absence and loss into the forms of excess that nation cannot imagine.

The prolongation and haunting of the past expressed in the image of the door provides Brand with a language for diasporic subjectivity. Thirst, like the phrase “Water More Than Flour,” is both literal and metaphorical, corporeal and affective, felt and unspoken. In both expressions, the intangible “grace of a phrase” communicates Alan’s “brittle, gnawed life” as well as the casual horror and careless grace of his untimely and unjust death. This is evident in Alan’s utterance of thirst: “he dropped the clippers to hold his breaking face, / he felt dry, “Jesus . . . thirsty . . .” he called, falling” (XII). The perceived violence of the clippers contributes to his being shot, the “cut” of one responsible for the “break” in the other. The brilliance of Brand’s fusion of the quotidian and the transcendent is evident in these lines: “Jesus” is an ordinary “cuss” word, a taking of the Lord’s name in vain, but Alan’s words immediately recall Jesus’s exclamation in the throes of crucifixion, “I am thirsty” (John. 19.28), constructing him as a martyr figure of sorts and the Toronto police as Roman soldiers. The shift from Jesus’ “I thirst” (sometimes written as ‘I am thirsty’) to Alan’s statement of “Jesus . . . thirsty . . .” resituates thirst as a simultaneously dispersed and encompassing condition. Alan thus becomes a representative figure rather than a random victim of accidental violence.

Alan’s parched utterance is just one of the many references to Christianity, Jesus Christ and Christian redemption in the poem. This Christian imagery lends a sense of transcendence to the poem’s depiction of absence and mourning. The thirty three sections of the poem reflect the
Christological calendar as well as the number of miracles Christ performed during his life.

Furthermore, Christian imagery infuses the poem even in unexpected moments such as when the speaker describes the three women having “hoped without salvation for a trolley / they arrived at the corner impious, then, / wracked on the psalmody of the crossroad,” (II). The elevated diction of “salvation,” “psalm,” “impious” and “cross” seems incongruous with its apparent object, the trolley, and subjects, the women. It serves the purpose of transfiguring this otherwise everyday scene while also gently mocking this pilgrimage. Brand challenges the conventional significance of the Middle Passage as traumatic repetition by making everyday plights continuous with the long history of slavery and racism, thus granting them dignity and grandeur, while her humour brings such pretensions to significance back to earth. The conformity of life in Toronto to the Christological calendar, however, lends Alan’s death prophetic weight. His utterance gestures to a world that has not yet come into being just as his “rough Bible” (XII) contains a truth no one is willing to hear. Brand’s jarring shifts in diction and her infusing of the quotidian with Biblical imagery and the Christian language of redemption confers grace upon these acts of abiding.

The speaker describes Alan as himself “jeremiad at the door” (XII), making his body and his speech inseparable. This links diasporic temporality with the temporalities of return and redemption found in the Christian form of the jeremiad. David Howard-Pitney offers the following definition of the rhetorical form of the jeremiad:

The term *jeremiad*, meaning a lamentation or doleful complaint, derives from the biblical prophet, Jeremiah, who warned of Israel’s fall and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by Babylonia as punishment for the people’s failure to keep the Mosaic covenant. Although Jeremiah denounced Israel’s wickedness and foresaw tribulation in the near-
term, he also looked forward to the nation’s repentance and restoration in a future golden age. (5; italics in original)

Howard-Pitney’s definition expands on Wilson Moses’s term “Black Jeremiad” to describe “the constant warnings issued by blacks to whites, concerning the judgment that was to come from the sin of slavery” (Moses 30 - 31). This African-American jeremiad adopts the tropes and symbols of American Puritan jeremiads, such as America as a “city on a hill” and the Puritans’ imagining of themselves as having “undergone an exodus from “Egyptian bondage” in Europe to a wholly new world” (Howard-Pitney 6). Alan himself is described as “jeremiad at the door” (XII) and as a religious “man frothing a biblical lexis at Christie / Pits, the small barren incline where his mad sermons / cursed bewildered subway riders, his faith unstrained” (II). The speaker, however, is more skeptical than Alan, explaining that Alan “was thirsty, as I, … / though we were not the same, / god would not be sufficient for me,” (XIII). The disjunction between Alan’s and the speaker’s perspectives reveals that while their longings are the same, Alan’s turn to the jeremiad and the temporality of return and redemption does not suit the speaker. Unlike Alan, her thirst cannot be slaked by god or by the promise of a restored past. Rather, the speaker suggests another lexicon and temporality to quench her own thirst.

Alan’s jeremiad, the poem’s organizing metaphor of thirst, the transferred epithets of the diaspora and the image of the door/way conceive of diasporic time as a present that is eclipsed by the losses of a prolonged past. The language of personal and political longing occurs in the deployment of tropes such as analepsis, prolepsis, and metalepsis. Diasporic time caught between the door and the doorway is inscribed in the poem through a conception of the present as an ongoing form of analepsis.; that is, not ‘living in the past’ but rather a notion of the present as composed out of the imaginative substance of the absences of the past. When the poem does
engage in acts of prolepsis, it is imagined as a restoration, in the future, of the past. This is the condition that the speaker observes in Chloe and Julia describing them as “limbless, handless, motionless” (XVIII) and as frozen in time “since that day which they are still standing in” (XVIII). The speaker hopes to shift this frozen temporality and move from this ongoing analepsis of the diaspora towards a time in which the present and future are no longer dictated by the traumas of the past. Brand’s literary-historical ambitions become clear once one comprehends her deployment of time. It is this feature that marks not only her disruption of linear time but her interruption of the genre of the Canadian long poem which has thus far failed to accommodate the historical presence of blackness or the tale of diaspora in the story of nation.

Poet and critic Frank Davey observes that the first, most obvious, and perhaps most important, “sign we see in the long poem is its length, promising to the reader that its matter is large in depth or breadth” (“Contemporary Canadian Long Poem” 183). The critical problems of identifying the attributes of the genre of the Canadian long poem are numerous; indeed, the length of the long poem is perhaps its only stable identifying feature. D.M.R. Bentley, in the opening essay to a critical collection on the long poem, *Bolder Flights: Essays on the Canadian Long Poem* (1998), concludes his “Introductory Survey” of the genre with the question “[is there] any more a justification for using the term ‘the Canadian long poem,’ or should every long poem written by someone with Canadian citizenship or experience be treated as a singularity” (19)? Interestingly, Bentley links the absence of innate features and the weakening of the form to what he sees as the weakening of the borders of the nation. He writes: “These are not idle questions at a time when regionalism, separatism, and globalization are working alongside multiculturalism, self-help therapies, and a host of minority and individual rights movements to reduce the Canadian nation to bite-sized chunks in the global soup of neo-conservatism” (19 – 20). Bentley’s
attributing the ‘reduction’ “of the Canadian nation to bite-sized chunks” to the forces of “multiculturalism, self-help therapies” and “minority and individual rights movements” reveals, perhaps, more about Bentley than the Canadian long poem, while the lumping of these developments with the “global soup of neo-conservatism” is puzzling, to say the least. Is the category of the nation, by Bentley’s estimation “conservative” in the good sense rather than what most contemporary critics would perceive as an “imagined community” at best and an exclusionary one at worst? Despite his vitriol, Bentley’s observations about long poetry seem to be correct, although his bemoaning the death (dearth?) of the stable genre of the contemporary Canadian long poem was predicted by Smaro Kambourelli in her On The Edge of Genre: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem (1991). Brand seizes upon this generic instability to inscribe black diasporic presences within the limits of the nation’s representative form and to illuminate the blindspots of narrations of nation. Bentley’s anxious uncertainty about the stable, identifying features of the contemporary Canadian long poem (the long poem in Canada?), perhaps against his will, paves the way for the disruption of generic limits and the experiments with form that characterize Brand’s singular reinvention.

Nearly twenty years before Bentley’s comments, Robert Kroetsch argued that the genre of the contemporary Canadian long poem is organized around the thematizing of the perpetual delay of the poem’s meaning and conclusion. In his postmodern, fragmentary essay “For Play and Entrance: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem” (1982), Kroetsch argues that “In love-making, in writing the long poem – delay is both – delay is both technique and content. Narrative has an elaborate grammar of delay. ... Poets, like lovers, were driven back to the moment of creation; the question, then: not how to end, but how to begin. Not the quest for ending, but the dwelling at and in the beginning itself” (117 – 8). Kroetsch argues that delay is both the operative
temporality and generative force of signification in the long poem and of orgasm in lovemaking. For Kroetsch, the meaning of a long poem is generated in the play between the act of signification and the perpetually-deferred arrival of meaning. Frank Davey, in “The Language of the Contemporary Canadian Long Poem” (1983), writes that Kroetsch “reads the energy of the long poem as sexual energy, and delay as postponement of a terminating orgasm. This theory ... has unhappy implications for the life of the long-poem ... and contains at least a hint of exclusively male perspective” (185). According to Davey, Kroetsch’s theory of the long poem is a masculine, phallocentric formulation wherein the temporal movement of the poem is imagined as a manifestation of the sexual desire of an implicitly heterosexual, male speaker. Indeed, the very title of Kroetsch’s essay announces the phallocentrism of his controlling metaphor. Davey attempts to recover Kroetsch’s focus on temporality from this “exclusively male perspective,” arguing instead that “we see the impulse not to delay but to prolong, to have the poem not be about time but in it” (188). Davey sees Kroetsch’s “view of the Canadian long poem as a narrative of disappointment and failure,” and he suggests instead that the movement of the long poem is a “movement from surprise to surprise, it is prolonged not only to delay but to continue, it anticipates more rather than postpones” (185). Davey contradicts Kroetsch's perception of lack with his emphasis on the productive and generative force of meaning in the long poem.

Both Davey and Kroetsch offer a vocabulary of temporality and desire with which to discuss the Canadian long poem, organized as it is around processes of delay, prolongation and anticipation. Smaro Kamboureli synthesizes Davey’s and Kroetsch’s arguments, suggesting that the Canadian long poem thematizes its own disruption of the traditional rules of genre through its inscription of temporality. Anticipating a number of the problems later identified by Bentley,
Kamboureli insists that the problem of genre is, in fact, the mark of the Canadian long poem.²² She writes

the contemporary long poem, while belonging to the genus of poetry, cannot be fully identified with one of its eidoi. By being both outside and inside the established poetic genres, the long poem participates in the category of poetry while defying its limits, the generic laws of its species. This ambivalent positioning marks the deconstructive activity of the long poem. By challenging the monism of the traditional concept of genre, the long poem invites the reader to rethink its laws. (48 – 49; italics in original)

Bentley fears that the instability of the genre signals its demise and perhaps that of the nation itself, while Kamboureli is less anxious: its instability is a sign of the "deconstructive activity of the long poem," an activity which “invites the reader to rethink” the laws of genre and poetic form.²³ Kamboureli’s argument both reveals the instability of the genre of the Canadian long

²²Sandra Djwa takes issue with a great deal of Kamboureli’s argument, especially her relegation of E.J. Pratt to the margins of the development of the Canadian long poem. Against Kamboureli’s assertion, Djwa insists on “Pratt’s centrality to the development of the Canadian long poem; indeed, it is doubtful if the long poem would have emerged as a distinctive Canadian genre without Pratt’s example” (65). Djwa then proceeds to dispute Kamboureli’s claim that Pratt’s “idiosyncratic originality” led to his marginalization within the development of the genre by demonstrating Pratt’s influences over subsequent poets such as Atwood, Reaney and Ondaatje. In his review of Bolder Flights, Tracy Ware tempers the critique of Kamboureli, explaining that “Kamboureli is a fine critic when she deals with the postmodern writing to which she is sympathetic. On the Edge of Genre would be a better book without its opening attempt at a historical survey, which a good editor would have removed” (46). For perhaps the strongest criticism of Kamboureli’s argument, see Manina Jones (1992). I agree with Djwa that Kamboureli’s text glosses over Pratt’s undeniable importance to Canadian long poetry. I also agree with Ware that Kamboureli’s historical survey is inadequate; D.M.R. Bentley’s “A General History” of the early Canadian long poem in Mimic Fires: Accounts of Early Long Poems On Canada (1994) offers a far more nuanced and accurate account of the genre. Yet these criticisms do not take away from the importance of Kamboureli’s theorizing of the destabilization of national genre alongside the destabilization of the nation. Kamboureli’s general thesis that the Canadian long poem “is produced within … the very generic and cultural fissures it observes … between its colonial predecessors and postcolonial instances” (204) marks a unique intervention into reading the Canadian long poem that productively situates debates concerning national literary forms within concerns about the eroding stability of the nation.

²³In some respects Kamboureli’s argument relies on a false concept of genre as stable textual “monism” which she then demonstrates is disrupted by the long poem. Surely there is a similar “ambivalent positioning” within seemingly more stable genres of writing and genres are far more flexible and versatile.
poem and indicates how that instability intervenes in the poem’s generation of meaning. Her argument about genre synthesizes Kroetsch’s and Davey’s theories of temporality to indicate the manner in which ambivalent temporality is linked to the long poem’s “deconstructive activity” (49) and its formal “inscription of otherness” (101).

Kamboureli is more generous than Davey in her assessment of Kroetsch’s heterocentric articulation of masculine desire, arguing instead that he “speaks of the ideologically phallocratic configurations assigned to gender roles” (79). She writes,

the long poem emerges from Kroetsch’s essay as a desire machine (re)producing ... its ‘pressure toward madness,’ its ‘protests’ against closure, against ‘accuracy and source’.

The deferral of orgasm that Kroetsch finds inscribed in the length of poems is nothing other than the long poem’s seduction by process, its unwillingness to submit to any pre-formalized versions of closure. Desire, as we have seen, informs the quest in the long poem, but this is not the kind of desire Kroetsch discusses. (Edge of Genre 80)

Kamboureli stresses the way in which “Desire ... informs the quest in the long poem” and argues that Kroetsch’s theory of desire depends on the temporality of the long poem. The language of becoming, of delay, of “the long poem’s seduction by process” are all aspects of the long poem’s temporalities that are critical to Kamboureli’s understanding of the long poem as a form which resists any closure or conclusion. These are instances of the temporal order of the long poem which represent time as openness, process, and generation rather than as discrete, conclusive, or fixed. Kamboureli places both Davey’s and Kroetsch’s temporal concepts in a continuum with one another in order to indicate the long poem’s resistance to closure and to insist on the form’s drawn out, extended, and aporetic temporality. She writes:

than Kamboureli suggests? Indeed, are the borders of genres not defined by the exemplary works which disrupt generic patterns and break the “generic laws of [their] species?”
Delay: its meditative turns, its hesitancy to begin, its pauses, detours, and double-takes; prolongation: the rupture of what both Kroetsch and Davey call discreet occasion ... a remission of time, making a thing process. ... Whereas delay and anticipation operate against a preconceived ending, prolongation functions according to momentariness, situating the long poem both within and outside a time continuum; ... Delay and prolongation extend the aporetic structure of the long poem. Although prolongation comes as a riposte to delay, both of them function as engendering and not as organizing principles. (85)

Kamboureli supplements Kroetsch’s arguments about poetic-sexual delay, the waiting time between the moment of speech and the longed-for eruption of the “discreet occasion,” with Davey’s logic of prolongation in order to indicate how these two temporal elements of the long poem “function as engendering and not as organizing principles.”

Of course Kamboureli focuses on the contemporary Canadian long poem’s postmodern deconstruction of genre, but I want to argue that Kamboureli’s deconstruction of genre can be extended to blacken the nation through challenging its representative literary form. The temporal effects of “Delay,” “prolongation,” “a remission of time,” and “making a thing process” (85) are all present in thirsty in both the content and form of the poem. My reading of thirsty is organized around these multiple poetic temporalities, as they articulate diasporic subjectivity, in an attempt to be attentive to both the poem’s formal qualities (and its positioning in terms of genre) as well as its concerns about diasporic politics and subjectivity. I argue that Brand represents diasporic subjectivity, in Cho’s sense, as one of suspension, dwelling, delay, and through the poetic act of “making a thing process” (85). Brand’s temporalities of delay, prolongation and anticipation describe the way in which one “becomes diasporic” and these multiple temporalities express the
combination of longing, mourning, nostalgia and hopefulness that characterize black diasporic experience. Brand depicts diasporic subjectivity as a complicated prolongation of the past and delay of the future. This is not the kind of play of the signifier expressed by Davey and Kroetsch but a concrete, historical “blackening” of such play to reveal the presence of the past and the imagination of the future.

Returning to the first section of the poem, the speaker’s demand “let me declare doorways” is structured according to just such a temporality, particularly in the manner in which the fulfillment of that desire is delayed. The speaker states,

let me say,

standing here in eyelashes, in
invisible breasts, in the shrinking lake
in the tiny shops of untrue recollections
the brittle, gnawed life we live,
I am held, and held (I)

The temporal delay between the speaker’s demand, “let me say,” the numerous qualifications and the speaker’s eventual assertion, “I am held, and held” enacts the sense of delay that organizes the poem’s conception of diasporic temporality. This delay operates in the space between the speaker’s expression of her intent to speak and her utterance. Prolongation and delay operate through poetic repetition. In this stanza the prolongation of a moment is evident in the specific repetition of the words “in” and “held,” both of which signal a slowing down of temporality and of being caught in a moment. The repetition of the word “in” and of numerous words that contain the word “in,” “standing,” “invisible,” “shrinking,” positions the speaker within the time that she is describing. This repetition suggests that the speaker is held within and implicated in this
inventory of broken things. The repetition of “in” stresses the speaker’s position of being caught within this prolonged temporality, forever “held and held” and waiting for the time to break out of that temporality. These examples suggest that thirsty enacts Davey’s argument that long poetry is not “about time but in it” (188). These images of decay and shrinking show how the time of diaspora is inflected by absence, loss and longing. Yet, the speaker is impatient with being caught “in” this time and she longs for a way out of this time, a means to break out of this prolonged suspension. Unlike Kroetsch’s emphasis on the pleasures of delay and deferral, the speaker’s suspension and anticipation are both intense and impatient.

The speaker’s impatience and ambivalence are evident in the final line of the stanza where she declares “I am held, and held.” Here the language of being “held” suggests temporal and physical holding, predicting the speaker’s later description of her project as “this embrace with broken things” (I), of being physically touched, affected and held by the broken subjects of the poem. This simultaneous experience of being suspended and embraced is akin to Derek Walcott’s “contempt for historic time … subject to a fitful muse, memory” (“Muse of History”354). Brand rejects the distance of history for the intimacy of memory, despite being aware of the limits of both. Like Walcott’s Muse of History, Brand’s speaker demonstrates the “rational madness of history seen as sequential time, of a dominated future” (“Muse of History” 357). The word “held” suggests that for diasporic subjects this “sequential time” constitutes a kind of temporal paralysis, continually eclipsed by the great disasters and losses of slavery, the Middle Passage and colonialism. Brand’s speaker intervenes in this “historic time” in her expression of diasporic temporality. Brand explains the limitations of “historic time” to the

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24 There is a similar structure of repetition in Brand’s “Water More Than Flour” where the repetition of the phrase suggests the felt permanence of the condition of barrenness as well as the power of the phrase to alleviate that barrenness.
diasporic subject when she refers to Derek Walcott’s desire to “Pray for a life without plot, a day without narrative” (Map 42; italics in original). She explains that Walcott’s line “described perfectly my desire for relief from the persistent trope of colonialism. To be without this story of captivity, to dis-remember it, or to have this story forget me, would be heavenly. But of course in that line too is the indifference, the supplication of prayer” (Map 42). The doubleness of “dis-remember” indicates the contradictory, if not impossible, impulse to escape a history that has defined the very diasporic community that aims to shake free of its grasp. Moreover, it captures time doubling back on itself, prolongation and delay constitute a forgetting, a “supplication” that history cease to remember the diasporic subject rather than an act of denial on that subject’s part. Perhaps Brand’s poetics attempts to inscribe her desire for a “life without plot, a day without narrative” in the sense that poetry challenges the dominant plots and narratives of history. While history emplots her as a silent, voiceless, suffering black woman, poetry can release her from the hold of that emplotment. Brand’s poetics of the quotidian employs a temporality that rewrites mourning for the absences of the past as the conditions of possibility for being dis-remembered by the haunting tropes of colonialism. In place of a narrative of history or a plot of recovery, the poetics of the quotidian makes absence material and transforms mourning and loss into the grounds for political transformation and personal becoming.

These temporal structures of delay and prolongation construct the diasporic present as a kind of empty time, in Walter Benjamin’s sense, caught between a prolonged past and a delayed future. The present is “eclipsed” by the prolongation of the past and the delay of the future. As the poem progresses, the speaker links her own historical consciousness to the temporalities and histories of the wider diasporic community of the poem. Like Brand’s longing for a life without the persistent trope of origins and home, the speaker observes, in the twentieth section of the
poem, the inhabitants of “this vagrant, fugitive city” and their “conditional sentences about conditional places. ‘If we were home. I would . . .’ as strong a romance with the past tense as with what is / to come…. / important in the middle of the pluperfect” (XX). The repetition and multiple meanings of the word “conditional” indicate both the uncertain and contingent nature of diaspora as well as the fact that diasporic subjectivity constitutes a condition and a sentence of sorts. This condition of diasporic subjectivity is the “romance with the past tense” and the position of the subject “in the middle of the pluperfect.” The speaker’s use of “romance” stresses the pleasure with which diasporic subjects dwell in the past and recreate the future as a return to the lost past. Brand argues that diasporic longing is expressed as a kind of romance or fiction which constructs “what is / to come” based on “what they choose to remember and what they mis-forget of places / they’d known” (XX). In this sense the diasporic subject is never ‘here’ or ‘now’ but is caught between past and future, conceiving of the future as a return to an idealized past. The speaker expresses this sense of betweenness in the temporalities of prolongation and delay present in the line break between “what is” and “to come.” The pause between lines thematizes the temporal break between present and future tense, stressing the diasporic subject’s interstitial position between a prolonged past and a delayed future. Yet the speaker complicates this attention to the past by differentiating between those who “choose to remember” and those who continually “mis-forget.” The difference between choosing to remember and mis-forgetting is the difference between drawing on the past as a stable resource of origins and identity and being “eclipsed by” and unable to escape the losses, traumas and silences of the past. Indeed, the negative activity of mis-forgetting suggests the inescapable and involuntary persistence of the absences of the past and the manner in which the past continues to haunt the present and determine the future of the black diaspora. The special case of the black diaspora is that one
cannot “choose to remember,” as the past is inescapable and the present is riddled with the absences of the past. The speaker suggests that one must mis-forget, invoking the active fictionalization of memory and origins that attempts to undo the absenting of origins in the black diaspora. Chloe and Julia are not able to “choose” what they remember, nor can they afford a “romance” with the past. Rather, they mis-forget Alan such that his absence is paradoxically rendered more and more present in their lives. In Derek Walcott’s terms, Chloe’s and Julia’s “admirable wish to honour the degraded ancestor limits their language to phonetic pain, the groan of suffering, the curse of revenge. The one of the past becomes an unbearable burden” (355). This unspoken and unbearable burden traps them “in the middle of the pluperfect” and their acts of mis-forgetting stress both their compulsion to remember and their struggle to forget. Brand’s speaker aims to provide a poetic and political language that can move from a present overdetermined by the past to one which can imagine different possibilities for the future. While the speaker is sympathetic to Chloe’s and Julia’s acts of mis-forgetting, as it enables them to survive their loss, she also wants to find a doorway that will enable her to transform that romance with the past into a poetic grammar of the future. The speaker of the poem is a figure akin to Walcott’s Muse of History in that she is able to name what Chloe and Julia struggle to articulate. The speaker transforms their “phonetic pain” and “groan of suffering” into a poetic language of possibility.

The speaker highlights both their temporal and physical sense of paralysis, describing them as “two women ... limbless, handleless, motionless” (XVIII) who have been frozen in time “since that day which they are still standing in” (XVIII). The speaker’s repetition of “less” in her depiction of the absence of limbs, hands and motion highlights the sense of loss that Chloe and Julia experience and also writes them as a kind of negative-presence or absence in the present.
The speaker describes “The street / now in full flight, no one notices they are arrested, / waiting for a return” (XVIII). Indeed, the speaker observes how, for Chloe and Julia, “Time starts with her and ends when she leaves.” In one sense, Chloe and Julia are fixed in the past, held in time by their loss and the dissolution of their family. Yet despite this description of temporal and physical paralysis and an associated sensation of hopelessness and pessimism, there is also a sense of optimism and possibility evoked in the number of phrases expressed in the future tense. The women imagine that, upon the daughter’s return, “they will tell her,” “they will confess their loneliness, they will / promise her,” “They will dream for her,” “They lust to kiss her husband,” “they will love,” “She will turn,” “They imagine each / that they will be ready with a rare laugh ... / if she comes back” (XVIII). The complicated temporal relationship between the future tenses of Chloe’s and Julia’s hopes and their desire to recover the past, to have the daughter “come back,” shows how they live in an empty present and imagine a future that is a return to an idealized past. Alan’s death is a traumatic incident which paralyzes Julia and Chloe such that they are forever “held” “in” the time before his death, but Alan’s death is only one instance of this sense of lost hope and possibility. The speaker generalizes this temporality of loss when she explains that “Anyone, anyone can find themselves on a street corner / eclipsed, as they, by what deserted them” (XXVIII). Here the loss associated with Alan’s death becomes one exemplary instance of a general sense of loss that the speaker observes in the black diaspora. Yet, the opposite is also true—the past appears in the language of the future, in the return of desire to this scenario of loss, in the aggression that attaches itself to “lust.” The insertion of the conditional “if she comes back” tempers the metaleptic oscillation between past and future by emphasizing that “they will be ready with a rare laugh.” It is their readiness that matters, their newfound awareness of the precious nature of “the rare laugh” that will mark the moment of her return. Brand’s depiction of
Julia and Chloe’s everyday “misforgetting” reveals the sense of possibility and change in their slightest acts of lust, longing, anticipation, and laughter. Where the signs of historical change might be absent Brand suggests that the nuances, gestures and postures of the quotidian provide evidence of subtle, encouraging, forms of change.

This diasporic temporality manifests itself in the metre and structure of the poem, particularly in the use of line breaks, pauses and caesura. In the second section of the poem, the speaker introduces Chloe, Julia and the unnamed daughter as they wait, on the anniversary of Alan’s death, to return to the place where he was killed:

They had hoped without salvation for a trolley,
they arrived at the corner impious, then,
wracked on the psalmody of the crossroad,
they felt, the absences of a morning (II)

While the first line of this section is in perfect trochaic hexameter and the third and fourth lines are both written in pentameter, the meter of the second line is uneven and is exactly eleven syllables. The second line would be in pentameter but the meter is disrupted with the addition of “then,” at the end of the line. The addition of “then,” surrounded by commas, introduces a feminine, terminal caesura at the end of the line, disrupting the otherwise even meter of the stanza. It is unclear whether the “then” in this line indicates the temporal past or the future. Does the speaker’s use of “then” describe what happened “back then,” in the past tense (as the first line of the stanza is written in the past tense), or does the speaker imply “then” in the sense of what happened next (as in: then, wracked on the psalmody of the crossroad)? The addition of “then” to a line that is otherwise in perfect pentameter explicitly disrupts the metre of the stanza with a caesura at the end of the second line, near the middle of the stanza. That the caesura is marked by
a temporally ambiguous “then” indicates that this caesura also marks a temporal disruption in the lives of the three women standing at the corner. They are at once looking to the past, as this is the anniversary of Alan’s death, and looking to the future as indicated by the imagery of crossroads, hope and their anticipated movement. This caesura, both grammatical, in the use of commas, and metric, in the disruption of poetic meter, makes the meter of the poem bespeak its temporality.

This stanza ends with a caesura, as the final line reads, “they felt, the absences of a morning” (II). The link between the caesura of the line and the double meaning of “morning” invokes the absented presences of Alan and the door. The caesura in the line pauses the speaker’s description of how the women “felt,” thus indicating the affective experience of delay and prolongation. The pause in the line at the mention of how “they felt” indicates that their memories of Alan are felt as a lived pause in the temporality of their existence. Their gestures, affectations, the postures of their bodies and the very temporality of their lives depend on this sense of loss and the empty time of the present. In the same section of the poem, the sixth stanza reads:

    each her own separate weight,
    each carried it in some drenched region of flesh,
    the calculus of silence, its chaos,
    the wraith and rate of absence pierced them (II)

Here the speaker explains how the absence of Alan’s death is a lived bodily experience for all three women. His absence is not lodged strictly in memory or emotion but rather is carried “in some drenched region of flesh,” an image that expresses the intense sadness and the weight of their loss. The words “weight” and “flesh” make the lines metrically uneven, with the first and second lines having seven and eleven syllables respectively. The mourning body is as much a metrical disruption as it is a surrendering of flesh to tears. This suggests that the prolonged past
disrupts the lived temporality of the diasporic subject. This diasporic temporality is also present in the final line of the stanza where the speaker describes how “the wraith and rate of absence pierced them.” The description of absence as piercing suggests both disruption and termination: Alan’s life as well as their existence are cut short. This is echoed in the assonance of the strong ‘A’ sounds in “wraith” and “rate” which disrupts the otherwise muted tone of the line and the stanza. This disruption of the tone of the line parallels the sense of piercing and cutting that marks Alan’s loss. "Wraith" alludes to the ghostliness of Alan’s absent-presence, but it rhymes imperfectly with "rate," thus linking it to "calculus" in an extended mathematical metaphor that insinuates the incalculable loss they have suffered. Brand shows how poetic language’s sensitivity to the inexpressible succeeds in communicating the interminable nature of the women’s loss, something that the measured pace of historical progress or plot cannot comprehend or communicate.

Alan himself is repeatedly represented as a caesura to stress his absence in the poem, in the lives of his family members and in the Canadian historical record. The first description of Alan occurs in the second section of the poem:

This slender lacuna beguiles them,

a man frothing a biblical lexis at Christie

…

then nothing of him but his parched body’s declension

a curved caesura, mangled with clippers, and
clematis cirrhosa and a budding grape vine he was still
to plant when he could, saying when he had fallen, “. . . thirsty . . .” (II)
Throughout these two stanzas and the sections that focus on Alan, Alan’s absence is described in grammatical terms. Alan is first described as a “slender lacuna” frothing his “biblical lexis.” The image of Alan as a slender lacuna makes his absence rather than his presence substantial: even his lacuna is slender! The transferred epithets in this section link his “mangled” body to the history of violence against black people through the depiction of his “ parched body’s declension.” Yet the image of the lacuna here also prefigures Alan’s absence in the poem and the speaker’s attempt to recreate the events of his death and of the three women’s lives after his death. Alan is absent from the poem and from the lives of the three women and his presence is only recalled, remembered, intuited, felt and imagined by the speaker and the women in the poem. Alan’s absence and loss continues to haunt Chloe and Julia. In this sense, the depiction of Alan as a kind of absent presence and as a beguiling figure recalls Brand’s observation that “The door casts a haunting spell on personal and collective consciousness in the Diaspora” (Map 25). Alan, like the door, is a figure of past trauma and lost origins that beguiles the three women who survive him. The women’s response to Alan’s death is “captured in individual doubt, a hesitation, / and what they could not put into words,” (II). Julia, for instance, develops a “fluttering” in her hand after Alan’s death and the fluttering of her hand is a marker of the anxieties, longings and absences that she cannot articulate. The speaker describes “the meter / of Julia’s hand more intuitive than any set of sounds” (XXIV). Poetry and the body express what language cannot. The lacunae and caesuras of this passage give texture to the abstract condition of thirst and unspeakable longing that the speaker observes are the hallmarks of diasporic subjectivity. The lacunae and caesuras lend weight to the thirst while stressing the discontinuous nature of diasporic temporality. In addition to delay and prolongation, these caesuras mirror the speaker’s project to break apart the temporality of the present, to show how the present moment is inflected and delimited by the past.
The caesura is thus both the representative figure of temporality and its deconstruction and disfiguration.

The importance of caesuras to thirsty’s poetics can be interpreted as an instance of Kamboureli’s argument that “The contemporary long poem accomplishes its inscription of otherness through its temporality, specifically the present tense” (101). While Kamboureli is primarily interested in the generic and formal otherness of the long poem (as it differentiates itself from and engages in a “deconstruction of the lyric, epic, [and] narrative” (101)), she also links this formal otherness to the otherness of the speaking “subject that enunciates it” (101). thirsty does employ the present tense throughout the poem, beginning with the line “This city is beauty” while the speaker announces herself by saying “I am innocent as thresholds” (I). But the poetic present is in vital contradiction to the historical present which appears as the apparent past of the “great disaster” of the black diaspora. Kamboureli’s focus on the present tense highlights the long poem’s formal sense of being caught between the past and the future, yet for her this is always linked to the long poem’s relation to past literary forms. Linking the development of the contemporary Canadian long poem with the genre’s appropriation and adaptation of past forms, she writes, “Appropriation of literary kinds is characterized by both repetition and difference. The repetition of established genres recalls the already ‘foreign’ past within the context of a ‘foreign’ present. The element of difference that enters this process is accomplished through a double gaze – what we might see in Kierkegaard’s terms as a looking backwards and a looking forwards” (25). For Kamboureli, this “double gaze” is accomplished through the long poem’s employment of the present tense whereby the long poem simultaneously expresses its anxiety of influence as well as the struggle to express itself differently and become a genre unto itself. Brand’s inscription of the diasporic present engages in a blackening of both poetic form and nation. The
poetics of enunciation hybridize the Canadian long poem, inflecting it with the persistent historical past of the Middle Passage and simultaneously expanding and pressing at the borders of the nation to include voices from its black diaspora.

Kamboureli predicts Brand’s project: “Originally a textual field marked by anxiety about its foreign past, and by the emptiness and namelessness of its present, the Canadian literary landscape gradually becomes a text inscribed by new names and characterized by a more acute sense of which genres better reflect the Canadian literary sensibility” (26). For Brand, unlike Kamboureli, the conditions of possibility for the long poem include the legacy of European forms in the shape of slavery and capitalism rather than exclusively the realm of literary traditions. In a sense, the double-consciousness of the door as “a trope for fixed forms” (Mason 784) links Brand’s concern about the influence of European literary traditions with her concerns about the manner in which European political structures continue to dominate contemporary diasporic life. In this respect, Kamboureli’s sense of the double-gaze can be linked to the “Janus-faced discourse of the nation” (Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* 3) which “at once gazes at a primordial, ideal past while facing a modern future” (Gopinath 186). The double-gaze of the nation is refracted by the presence of diasporic time, challenging the temporality of the nation with the diasporic temporality that pulses through *thirsty*. While Kamboureli’s discussion of the present tense of the long poem expresses the struggle of a national poetic genre, the Canadian long poem, to presently and continuously define itself against European literary norms and come into being as the voice of a nation, Brand’s articulation of diasporic temporality and voice dissects that national literary form and time to demonstrate the differences at work in conceptions of both the temporal present and of national identity. She writes the absences of diaspora within Canada to push at the borders of the nation. Brand’s inscription of temporality is decidedly extra-national and diasporic and
challenges the temporal order of the nation in order to articulate a space of difference for diasporic agency. Kamboureli’s argument that the long poem produces its inscription of otherness through the present tense can be usefully put into dialogue with the temporality of the nation to show how Brand’s blackening of the contemporary Canadian long poem is inseparable from her challenge to narrations of nation.

Homi Bhabha has forcefully argued the manner in which the nation is imagined not just spatially but also temporally and he stresses the importance of a particular temporal order to the nation’s stability and homogeneity. In one of his earliest essays on the relationship between the national community and national temporality, Bhabha argues that,

The narrative of the ‘meanwhile’ permits transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfilment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar. Such a form of temporality produces a symbolic structure of the nation as ‘imagined community’ which, in keeping with the scale and diversity of the modern nation, works like the plot of a realist novel. The steady onward clocking of calendrical time ... gives the imagined world of the nation a sociological solidity; it links together diverse acts and actors on the national stage who are entirely unaware of each other.

(Location of Culture 308)

For Bhabha, the unitary national body is organized through this “narrative of the ‘meanwhile’” which enables the “transverse, cross-time” and marshals together the diverse histories, identities and events of disparate locations via the national temporal present. It is, Bhabha argues, this “form of temporality [that] produces a symbolic structure of the nation as ‘imagined community’.” Bhabha’s analysis of the national temporality of the “meanwhile” can be contrasted with Kamboureli’s consideration of the structures of delay, process and prolongation that she
identifies in the long poem as disruptive of the empty time of the nation. Indeed, if the
temporality of the nation “works like the plot of a realist novel,” the plot and temporality of the
long poem operate in a far different manner, cutting into the time of the “meanwhile” and slowing
down, interrupting and breaking apart “The steady onward clocking of calendrical time” which
gives “the imagined world of the nation a sociological solidity.” I argue that Kamboureli’s
consideration of the temporal order of the long poem, which I have reinterpreted as diasporic
temporality in Brand’s work, can disrupt this national temporal order organized around the
meanwhile and the “steady onward clocking of calendrical time.” Indeed, if Bhabha’s national
meanwhile is heir to Walter Benjamin’s articulation of “the historical progress of mankind ...
through a homogeneous, empty time” (261), then Brand’s poetics breaks apart the seemingly
stable and sutured national time to create a space for black diasporic subjects in the nation.

*thirsty* inscribes the caesuras and ruptures of diasporic time within the nation such that
the enunciation of this diasporic present breaks apart the “sociological solidity” of the national
temporality and interrupts the “narrative of the meanwhile” with the voices of the black diaspora.
This “steady onward clocking of calendrical time” that “produces a symbolic structure of the
nation as ‘imagined community’” is forced to the margins of the poem as the speaker and the
figures in *thirsty* occupy a diasporic time that prefigures and exceeds the temporality of the
nation. The temporality of the nation is barely present in the poem as the speaker and other
figures occupy a different temporal order. This “symbolic structure of the nation” is present in
*thirsty* only as a force that marginalizes and abjects black diasporic people from the national
imaginary and temporality. One of the clearest examples of this marginalization occurs in the
speaker’s depiction of the newspaper and television coverage of Alan’s death. In the acquittal of
the police officers the speaker scoffs, “So, a cop sashaying from a courthouse, / … history and
modernity kissing here” (XXVI). The inevitability in the speaker’s expression of “So” and the pause of the comma positions this clichéd image of the innocent police officer within the homogeneous empty time of the Canadian national meanwhile. Furthermore, the romance of history and modernity implicit in the kissing and strut of the police officer evokes the manner in which historical forms of racial exclusion have been reinvented and contemporized within the narrative of the nation. Whereas the diasporic figures in the poem are located in interstitial spaces such as crossroads, thresholds, and doorways, the depiction of the policeman in the newspaper supports his presence “here.” In another rewriting of this national temporality the speaker describes Julia’s depiction in newspapers and notes the extraordinary emptiness of the woman emerging from clusters of dots on the front page then the second page, then the last page then vanishing all together, but not vanished there, in the time, transparent, held and held, she had been held, (XXXI)

Newspapers are integral to the constitution of the imagined community and I argue that the speaker depicts “the time” of the newspaper as complicit with Bhabha’s narrative of the national ‘meanwhile’. This is the temporal order that gives the nation its solidity and it is within this time that the speaker observes Julia’s “extraordinary emptiness.” Throughout this section the speaker traces the manner in which Julia and Alan are rendered increasingly absent from history and the national meanwhile. Yet Julia’s absence is not absolute, as Julia is still “there, in the time, transparent / held and held.” There is a similarity between this temporality of the present in which
Julia is held and Bhabha’s conception of the meanwhile of the nation as both temporalities admit no generative past and no future possibility. This empty time of the present is evident in the poem’s use of transferred epithets where the images of decay, shrinking, of being half-dead and inconclusive, all deny these subjects beginnings or endings of their own, as they are, within the empty present. Black diasporic subjects in Canada are denied any history within the nation as the national meanwhile erases the history of Alan’s death, the door of no return, the Middle Passage as irrelevant to the national narrative. I argue that Brand identifies this transparent national time as engendering a kind of restrictive and fixed form of politics and community; her aim in describing diasporic lives in the pluperfect and as leaning against the door is to rewrite the time of the present such that it expresses the gaps in this “transparent” empty time, gestures toward the future and propels her protagonists out of this experience of being “held, and held” in the empty time of the nation. Certainly the fugue of diasporic voices within the poem and Chloe’s and Julia’s struggle to break out of the temporality of the pluperfect disrupts this Canadian national time. By locating the temporality of the black diaspora within Canada, the speaker shows how the untimeliness of the black diaspora intervenes in and erodes this national temporality. The poem is populated with temporally “transferred selves” that imagine themselves as not here and now but rather elsewhere and in another time. Inscribing these transferred subjects within Canada cuts apart the temporality of the nation and suggests that there is an emerging diasporic time in Canada that exceeds the logic of a national meanwhile. Locating Alan’s death within Canada attempts to give black people a sense of origins and beginnings in Canada in a way that is attentive to the material and structural absences that Brand observes in the diaspora. In each of these respects thirsty intervenes in the national temporality, transforming the caesura of black
absence into a technique for cutting apart the homogeneous time of the present and inscribing a space for difference within the nation.

Bhabha theorizes this project of inscribing difference into the temporality and structure of the nation when he argues that “the performative introduces a temporality of the ‘in-between’ through the ‘gap’ or ‘emptiness’ of the signifier that punctuates linguistic difference” (Nation and Narration 299). Brand’s enunciation of the Canadian long poem introduces just such a temporality of the in-between. This is seen in thirsty in her rewriting of the emptiness of the newspaper where she writes diasporic temporality into the “transparent” time of the nation. For Bhabha, the relationship between the temporal order of the nation and the structure of the nation as “imagined community” can be disrupted by the temporality of the performative which indicates the staging at work in this construction of the nation as materially and temporally “present.” Bhabha argues that performative time disrupts this calendrical time and introduces what he calls a time-lag into the symbolic order of the nation which opens a space of antagonism, revealing the nation’s symbolic and political fissures. I argue that Brand’s depiction of the temporality of the black diaspora intervenes in the national “present” by inscribing the persistent absences and longings of diasporic life into Canada. The empty time of the national project is recast as the in-between time of the door/way in a way that re-tells the narrative of the nation and opens up possibilities for difference and change in the future. In this sense Brand challenges the abjection of black people from the nation and claims Canada as a space in the black diaspora. In a later essay that concludes The Location of Culture (1994), Bhabha argues that it is through the repetition and delay of the performative that one can engage in the “catachrestic postcolonial agency of ‘seizing the value-coding’ … that opens up an interruptive time-lag in the ‘progressive’ myth of modernity, and enables the diasporic and the postcolonial to be represented” (344). I
argue that *thirsty*'s poetic structures of delay, prolongation, repetition, and caesura cut into the temporal present of the nation to reveal the manner in which that present is haunted by unacknowledged and inarticulable histories. The broader project of *thirsty* to return to the traumatic and erased history of black people in Canada via the exemplary figure of Alan is one of the clearest ways that Brand intervenes in the progressive myth of the nation. Brand’s “catachrestic” poetics operates in both senses of the term: as a productive misnaming and rewriting of the nation in order to open a space for difference and as the creation of a poetic lexicon for the otherwise unnamed and inexpressible longings, yearnings and absences of the black diaspora.

Bhabha’s discussion of temporal lag as the site of a critique of modernity and the nation links the prolongation and delay that Kamboureli sees in the long poem with Brand’s project of blackening Canada and with writing black diasporic subjects into the nation. Indeed, Kamboureli’s description of the temporal structure of the long poem is echoed in Bhabha’s argument that “It is the function of the lag to slow down the linear, progressive time of modernity to reveal its ‘gesture’, its tempi, ‘the pauses and stresses of the whole performance’” (*Location of Culture* 364; italics in original). This could be read as a description of the function of delay and prolongation that Kamboureli discerns in the Canadian long poem. Brand’s inscription of the time of the door into the nation and her identification of the postures and gestures of diasporic life cut apart and “slow down the linear, progressive time” of modernity and nation. Bhabha’s and Kamboureli’s shared concerns over temporality bring to the fore the questions of diasporic agency, postcolonial critique and cultural difference at work in Brand’s long poetry. The anachronistic temporality of *thirsty*, the location of diasporic subjectivity within the pluperfect, the depiction of diasporic temporality as a kind of delay and prolongation and the use of poetic
caesuras, can all be read as instances of Bhabha’s time lag particularly in the sense that they articulate an alternate temporality to that of the nation.

Brand’s use of caesuras, as both a trope of absent-presence and as a poetic technique of delay and temporal disruption, is one of the clearest links between her poetry and the postcolonial critique that Bhabha locates in the insertion of the time-lag into the discourse of modernity. Brand’s long poetry uses caesura to cut apart national temporality to indicate the staging at work in the production of the national present and to “reveal its ‘gesture’, its tempî” (48). For Bhabha, the caesura marks the postcolonial moment in the time of modernity. As he explains,

Fanon’s discourse of the ‘human’ emerges from that temporal break or caesura effected in the continuist, progressivist myth of Man. He too speaks from the signifying time-lag of cultural difference that I have been attempting to develop as a structure for the representation of subaltern and postcolonial agency. Fanon writes from that temporal caesura, the time-lag of cultural difference (Location of Culture 340)

It is in his reading of Fanon’s chapter, “The Fact of Blackness,” that Bhabha moves from the language of the performative and introduces the language of caesura and cutting in his analysis of the time-lag of cultural difference. The caesura cuts through calendrical time in order to disrupt the smooth temporality of the national “Meanwhile.” Indeed, Bhabha’s description of Fanon’s “jagged testimony of colonial dislocation, [and] its displacement of time and person” (Location of Culture 59) prefigures this disruptive caesura that he later identifies in Fanon’s work. While critics have not remarked on Bhabha’s turn to caesura in his reading of Fanon (from the language of the performative and the time-lag), I find it particularly provocative in grappling with Brand’s alteration of the Canadian long poem and the discourse of the nation in the interests of diasporic black consciousness. The police bullets that cut Alan apart still resonate with violence and forced
absence; even more poignant, the image of Alan frozen in time with the clippers that slip from his grasp takes on new meaning in light of Bhabha’s account of the postcolonial critique of temporality.

Bhabha makes the connection between the struggle to inscribe “This caesura in the narrative of modernity” and the articulation of cultural difference and diasporic agency. He argues that “The ‘subalterns and ex-slaves’ who now seize the spectacular event of modernity do so in a catachrestic gesture of reinscribing modernity’s ‘caesura’ and using it to transform the locus of thought and writing in their postcolonial critique” (Location of Culture 353). He goes on to argue that

The problem of the articulation of cultural difference is not the problem of free-wheeling pragmatist pluralism or the ‘diversity’ of the many; it is the problem of the not-one, the minus in the origin and repetition of cultural signs in a doubling that will not be sublated into a similitude. What is in modernity more than modernity is this signifying ‘cut’ or temporal break: it cuts into the plenitudinous notion of Culture splendidly reflected in the mirror of human nature; equally it halts the signification of difference. The process I have described as the sign of the present – within modernity – erases and interrogates those ethnocentric forms of cultural modernity that ‘contemporize’ cultural difference

(Location of Culture 352; italics in original)

Bhabha’s articulation of cultural difference as a “problem of the not-one, the minus in the origin” indicates the way in which this temporal caesura not only opens the space for an articulation of difference but demonstrates the presence of differences in the origin itself.25 I argue that Brand’s

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25 This is particularly clear in Bhabha’s use of “sublated” to describe this “problem of the not-one, the minus in the origin ... in a doubling that will not be sublated into a similitude.” Bhabha’s use of “sublated” surely alludes to Hegel’s use of Aufhebung (roughly translated as ‘sublation’) to describe the interactions between
poetic caesuras, both as metaphors for absent-presences and as poetic embodiments of diasporic temporality, operate in a manner similar to Bhabha’s description of the “articulation of cultural difference.” Brand’s poetics practises what Bhabha explicates, that “What is in modernity more than modernity is this signifying ‘cut’ or temporal break.” Her work shows how the caesura of diasporic time is not only “in modernity” but is also “more than modernity.” Brand’s articulation of difference and diasporic time does not merely undermine but rather exceeds the logic of modernity and nation, enacting diasporic time’s erosion of national time. Brand’s use of caesura does not merely speak to absence but also to a continued presence of absence, thus revealing a minus in the origin of nation. This is a more radical notion of difference than that expressed by Canadian multiculturalism. This is evident in Bhabha’s description of the “ethnocentric forms of cultural modernity that ‘contemporize’ cultural difference” (Location of Culture 352). This is the form of multiculturalism that denies the nation’s history of diversity, abjecting black people from the history of the nation, and rewriting the national past as a steady progression towards inclusion, diversity, and multiculturalism. Additionally, these forms of nation “‘contemporize’ cultural difference” such that Canadian diversity becomes a sign of Canadian modernity. The signs of visible difference may contribute to Canada’s “timeliness, vitality, [and] inclusivity,” (Gilroy, Against Race 11) but Brand’s use of caesuras cuts into this national project to “contemporize” cultural difference, showing instead how cultural difference is not merely a sign of the present but has a history within Canada. I argue that Brand’s poetics intervenes in Canadian multiculturalism not only to historicize cultural difference within the nation but also, through the exemplary figure of Alan and his depiction as lacuna, caesura, and ellipses to

thesis and antithesis within a dialectic. The impossibility of sublating this repetition of cultural signs into a sign of cultural similitude (as a dialectical movement would require) indicates that the processes of the dialectic cannot function here and that this impossibility articulates contradiction rather than synthesis.
show that difference is not contained within the meaning of multiculturalism but instead must be understood in terms of the forced dispersals of diaspora, the dislocation of the Middle Passage and the absented presences of the black diaspora.

Brand’s anachronistic temporality disrupts the ‘Meanwhile’ of the nation and modernity and interrogates the content of the present to show how it is delimited by the past. The very content of thirsty intervenes in Canadian history from a black diasporic perspective to reveal the silences and absences of Canadian history thus disrupting the homogeneous, progressive present of Canada. Cultural difference is not contemporized by Brand but is historicized, such that the traces of the past inflect the present. This alternate vision of temporality, nation, and modernity, illuminates Brand’s oeuvre. The speaker of Inventory (2006) explains that she is “not willing another empire but history’s pulse / measured with another hand” (I). The speaker’s stated desire to measure history’s pulse with another hand links Brand’s poetics with Bhabha’s argument that the postcolonial articulation of difference is accomplished by inserting a new temporality into the forward-marching, calendrical time of the nation and modernity. This image of “history’s pulse / measured with another hand” depicts sick history diagnosed by the speaker who measures history according to a different conception of time. These lines resonate beautifully with, and may allude to, Derek Walcott’s argument in “The Muse of History” that “The pulse of New World history is the racing pulse beat of fear, the tiring cycles of stupidit and greed” (355). While Walcott identifies the temporality of modernity with this “racing pulse beat of fear,” Brand’s historicizing of diasporic difference employs poetry to identify the absences of history, reinscribe the caesura of the past and rewrite history according to another temporality. Brand’s poetics measures the “pulse of New World history” that has marginalized the historical and contemporary presences of the black diaspora and marked black diasporic subjectivity as non-coeval with modernity. Derek
Walcott and Brand transform the untimeliness of the black diaspora into a critique of the temporality of nation and modernity. Walcott predicts Bhabha’s observations about the temporal structure of modernity as well as the postcolonial imperative to intervene in that temporality when he explains that “The vision of progress is the rational madness of history seen as sequential time, of a dominated future” (357). Brand, Bhabha, and Derek Walcott share the view that the temporality of the nation relies on the “rational madness” of this “vision of progress.” The other hand with which Brand wants to measure historical time is the hand of poetry which offers an alternative temporality to the “vision of progress” that constitutes the narrative of history. Brand’s historicizing of diasporic difference employs poetry to identify the absences of history, reinscribe the caesura of the past and rewrite history with another temporality.

Brand’s poetic depiction of diasporic temporality intervenes in the temporality of the nation in ways that are unavailable to empirical or sociological analyses of diasporic subjects. As I have argued, readings of Brand’s work that focus strictly on plot commit the same error as strictly empirical readings of diasporic life in that they cannot account for the play of absence and presence that Brand observes in the diaspora. The speaker of *thirsty* describes Julia as “vanishing all together, but not vanished” (XXXI) and this play between vanishing but never finally vanished provides a language for the contradictory manner in which the absences of diaspora continue to make themselves felt and present. The poetic depictions of “waiting” “willing,” “longing,” “desiring” and “hoping” do indeed measure history with another hand, replacing the vision of progress with a language of the inarticulable absences of the diaspora and of the longing for change. In contrast to the speaker of *Inventory* who is concerned with a far more transnational project, to intervene in modernity and depict “history’s pulse / measured with another hand,” the speaker of *thirsty* is explicitly concerned with the historical and contemporary abjection of black
people from Canada and with rewriting black absence in ways that create a space for black people in the nation.

The speaker in *thirsty* rewrites the emptiness of the national ‘Meanwhile,’ replacing it with a catachrestic grammar of longing and yearning. This shift in the temporality of the nation is evident in the speaker’s declaration, “I anticipate nothing as intimate as history” (I). The intimacy of history foregrounds Brand’s poetic project to write the absences of black diasporic history through the intimacy of the relationship between Chloe, Julia and Alan. Yet, the intimacy of history also recalls Derek Walcott’s desire to “Pray for a life without plot” (Brand, *Map* 42; italics in original) and Brand’s own stated “desire for relief from the persistent trope of colonialism. To be without this story of captivity … would be heavenly” (*Map* 42). History is not merely ‘back then’ in the past but is intimately present and a daily, lived experience for black diasporic people. Henry Louis Gates’s “plaintive and childish question … Why did you sell us?” reveals the intimate way in which history continues to invade his life. Also, there is a sense of negative agency and of the lingering absences of history in Derek Walcott’s desire for a “life without plot,” in Brand’s longing to be “without this story of captivity” and in the speaker’s assertion that she “anticipates nothing as intimate as history.” Against the narrative of historical emplotment, the “story of captivity” and the “trope of colonialism,” the speaker reconceives of history as a negative present, as present in the absences of the quotidian. The speaker imagines history as a kind of negative presence, as a lingering of the absences and aporias of slavery and the Middle Passage. It is through poetry that Brand is able to trace these absences and negative presences of history. This is evident in a later stanza where Julia recalls the days that Alan died: “lust she had lost along with the things / in her suitcases that morning,” (XXXI). The speaker’s passive voice in this section stresses Julia’s immobility and lack of agency as well as the sense of
absence that permeates her life. Throughout this stanza Julia imagines the things that she has lost in the years since Alan’s death, namely her “lust” and “the idea, the idea that she was possible” (XXXI). She recalls how once “her body was dangerous and full of liquid” and how “dance floors would bleed from the knife of her dress” (XXXI). Now, however, both Julia and Chloe are “unslaked as ghosts / They cannot summon hope” (XVIII). Towards the end of the section the speaker explains that Julia “wanted her blue skirt back, she wanted that single sense she’d lost, anticipation” (XXXI). As the absence of things lost in the past gives way to the present absence of things to come in the future, the language of loss is transformed into the language of anticipation. In this sense the structural absence of intimate, historical loss is transformed into an anticipation of things yet to come.

*thirsty* ends with a depiction of this unspoken longing and this sense of anticipation. The speaker asserts, “Every smell is now a possibility, a young man / passes wreathed in cologne, that is hope; / teenagers, traceries of marijuana, that is hope too, utopia;” (XXXII). The speaker is positioned on the street and she locates hope not in the discrete identities of the people that pass her but in the acts of exchange and transferral that she observes in the smell of utopia that they exude and that lingers after they depart. “wreaths” and “traceries” communicate this web of interdependence. This sense of hopeful connectedness is also present in the speaker’s musings:

> A city is all interpolation. The Filipina nurse bathes a body, the Vincentian courier delivers a message, the Sikh cab driver navigates a corner. What happens? A new road is cut, a sound escapes, a touch lasts (XX)

Interpolation, rather than interpellation, reveals how this hope is located in the anticipation of plotting new political and subject positions. It is in these new moments in this “city / that’s never
happened before” (VIII) that “A new road is cut.” The discrete identities of “Filipina,” “Vincentian,” and “Sikh” give way to acts of interpolation and identities formed in exchange that constitute the kind of community that the speaker anticipates. The question “Where you from” tears the subject asunder in the act of interpellation that marks blackness as foreign and as an untimely presence within the nation. Brand rewrites this interpellation as interpolation, arguing that diasporic subjects are positioned between any stable notions of identity or belonging. In place of the desire to resolve the instability of this in-between identity, Brand valorizes this in-betweenness suggesting that in these mixings, connections and hybrid subjectivities, new possibilities of identity, community and politics emerge. Like the speaker’s use of transferred epithets throughout the poem, these concluding sections of the poem locate diasporic subjects neither in the ‘here’ nor ‘now’ but rather in the acts of exchange, interpolation and of cutting new routes.

The speaker has detailed the manner in which the painful absences of history signified by the door, Alan’s ghost and Julia’s suffering “lasts” and continue to tarnish the present moment of these diasporic lives. Yet there is a difference between the experience of being “held” in time and occupying a time that “lasts.” This second condition is a hopeful temporality that is no longer overshadowed by or continually reliving the traumas of the past but that occupies the present and anticipates the future. This expression of a time that “lasts” suggests the temporality of “interpolation” whereby the diasporic subject is not imprisoned by a longing for the past before the great disaster or for a future that is, paradoxically, a return or recovery of the past. Rather, occupying the present entails “living inside and outside of herself. It is to apprehend the sign one makes yet to be unable to escape it except in radiant moments of ordinariness made like art”
(Map 18 – 19). For Brand, these radiant moments are the province of poetry and in contradistinction to the limits of history.

The speaker’s move from the time of the door to that of the doorway is evident in the final section of the poem where the speaker describes “From time to time . . . frequently, always / there is the arcing wail of a siren, as seas” (XXXIII). The repetition of the phrase “From time to time” is the final repetition of the poem and evokes the prolonged temporality and the sense of being held in time that pervades the poem. Similarly, the ellipses after the repetition make delay and prolongation metrical. Yet I propose that the phrase “From time to time” is not simply a repetition of the same empty moment in which the speaker was “held.” I argue that the speaker moves from one time to another, from a time in which she was “held” to a time that “lasts” and the phrase gestures towards change, futurity and hope rather than strictly signifying a frozen or arrested temporality. The absences of the ellipses and the repetition of time opens up a space of difference. At the end of the poem the speaker describes her reaction to the siren: “I wake up to it, open as doorways, / breathless as a coming hour, and undone” (XXXIII). There is a tension between the present tense in the speaker’s statement, “I wake up to it” and the future tense in the speaker’s description of feeling “breathless as a coming hour.” This shifting of tense from the present to the future suggests the movement from one time to another and the anticipation of this “coming hour.” Linking this shift in tense, toward the future, to the image of the doorway stresses the turn in this final section of the poem to future possibility and to the hope of writing the doorways that the speaker wanted to declare in the opening of the poem. The language of openness, doorways, and breathlessness expresses anticipation and desire but the truly intriguing word is “undone” which suggests that the liquid future is also an undoing of the work of the past
and the suspension of the present. In this sense, Brand remains true to her demand for more water than flour in her anticipation of the future.

The word “undone” reconceives of Du Bois’s double-consciousness as not a condition to be resolved but rather a condition of possibility and interpolation. Brand’s historicizing of cultural difference, her writing of absence into the narrative of nation, and her depiction of identity as “interpolation” reignite the tired debate over Canadian multiculturalism in new ways. Against the state-sponsored or “corporate multiculturalism” (Gilroy, *Against Race* 21) that traffic in a mélange of discrete identities as signs of national “timeliness, vitality, inclusivity and global reach” (Gilroy, *Against Race* 21), Brand wants to see all identities “undone,” to, in Bhabha’s terms, locate the “minus in the origin” of identity and nation and to conceive of identity as open and in process. Like Du Bois who depicts the subject “torn asunder,” Brand’s double-consciousness gives voice to the negative identities that emerge through absence and difference. Her project of blackening pushes at the borders of the nation in order to make absented, abjected, and untimely presences welcome. My focus on “Water More Than Flour,” *A Map to the Door of No Return* and *thirsty* privileges the liquidity of poetics over the solidity of empirical analyses of diasporic experience. This emphasis on liquidity also differentiates Brand’s politics from Rinaldo Walcott’s insistence on inscription; Brand, rather surprisingly, perhaps, rejoices in their undoing, in the unravelling of fixed forms. Brand’s figures wait, thirst, lust, summon, and hope, evolving new forms of political community based on abiding and anticipation. Thus, Brand’s writing is not merely a means to an end; her poetic meditations are acts of blackening themselves.
Chapter 3: “I’m Running For My Life”: Mobility in Austin Clarke’s Recent Fiction

Loiterers should be arrested

-Jay Z, “On To The Next One”

And their four wheels would take them there
Till the cops came and said "There's no skating here"
So they Kick, Push, Kick, Push, Kick, Push, Kick, Push
Coast
And the way they roll
Just rebels without a cause with no place to go

-Lupe Fiasco, “Kick Push”

Austin Clarke’s most recent novel More (2008) begins with the protagonist, Idora Morrison, emerging from a dream. The narrator describes Idora “Coming out of the dream, the bells are ringing, and she holds her breath” (1). The opening of More recalls the conclusion of thirsty in which the speaker describes awakening from a dream: “I wake up to it, open as doorways, / breathless as a coming hour, and undone” (XXXIII). The speaker in thirsty awakens “to it,” “breathless,” “open,” and “undone,” suggesting wonder and anticipation. Idora awakens “out of” her dream, in her basement apartment to find that the circumstances of her life remain unchanged. She “holds her breath” hoping that the spiritual stasis and social paralysis that define her life have been transformed. And is disappointed. Waking to the bells, “she is entering full consciousness, and can remember how the trees look: straight and black from the ground to the first flaring-out of limbs, dead now on the thin layer of snow that whitens the ground in these cold, teeth-shattering mornings of winter, which she hates, even after thirty years living in Canada” (1). The
anticipation of the “coming hour” that infuses thirsty with a concluding sense of optimism and even “utopia” (XXXII) is absent in Idora’s life. Instead, she awakens to recall an image of decaying, barren black trees frozen in the whiteness of the Canadian winter. If the dream at the beginning of the narrative is the migrant’s dream of reinvention and a new life in a new country, that dream of reinvention is denied at the very outset of the text. In its place is the reality of black abjection from the Canadian body politic and black social immobility within Canada.

As Idora awakens she goes from remembering the trees in the park to imagining her own movement through the park and across the city. This opening passage of the novel is marked by a precise and evocative oscillation between its protagonist’s past and the narrative present. This striking passage, however, communicates the movement of time through physical movement across urban streets and, paradoxically, through Idora’s stream of consciousness which mimics the agility of bodily movement. While lying in bed, Idora imagines walking

in the short distance from her basement apartment, four streets to the south of the Park, straight as an arrow; and in her mind she crosses Queen Street, then a small street, Barton, that runs from Sherbourne to George Street; then a bigger street, Richmond, then Adelaide, and she walks through the small park and the garden patterned after nineteenth-century ones in London England, through the garbage with its smell left by dogs and homeless men; and other things that she does not like to look at, in this short walk from her neighbourhood, and she enters the huge, studded, brown, stained main door of the Cathedral that looks like the door to a castle; and sits down and settles herself in a pew whose seat is padded by a cushion and forgets her life, forgets her son, forgets “that man,” forgets the Island where she was born and had left thirty years ago, as an indentured servant, a “domestic” as she was known to the Governments of her Island and
of Canada; for “the loneliness, the loneliness, the loneliness,” as she would complain to her friend Josephine ... the man she wanted out of her life – even though he was in America, placing him here in this basement apartment, and making him sit on one of the two red-painted chairs, talking aloud to him even though he was there only in her imagination; (2-3)

The accuracy and precision with which Clarke maps out Idora’s movement allows him to demonstrate the traces that black bodies leave in the city through which they move, alone, unwanted and unnoticed.26 Idora’s movement writes the spaces of the city anew from a black diasporic perspective. Idora is relegated to a marginal space in Canada, and while the spaces of the city do not reflect her presence, her movement through the city marks the city with her past and present longings, thus becoming a means of combating her marginalization. This quotation comes from the novel’s opening sentence which spans the first four pages of the text and is written as a stream of consciousness focalized by Idora. The length of this opening sentence and its repeated use of semicolons, dashes, commas and ellipses indicate the leaps and movements in Idora’s thinking as well as the novel’s tight narrative focalization on Idora. Like Brand’s use of caesuras and repetition, the prolonged temporality at work here indicates the manner in which the present moment is overdetermined by the lingering effects and remainders of the past. The length of this sentence communicates the energetic movement of Idora’s thoughts as they jump from one image, recollection, memory, and fantasy to another.

26 One can trace Idora’s route on a map as she moves through Moss Park and through Toronto to the Cathedral. One error in Idora’s route is that Clarke seems to confuse “Barton” with “Britain St.” which is the actual street that Idora would cross according to her route. Clarke lives in this neighbourhood and knows it well, so perhaps his erasure of “Britain” from Idora’s route is more an anti-colonial joke than cartographic error.
The contrast between the activity and energy of the sentence, the energy and movement of Idora’s imagination, and Idora’s physical immobility within her basement apartment is equally telling. As she imagines this movement, Idora lies prostrate in her bed. The opening sentence finally ends, a few pages later, with the narrator explaining that “as she is still lying on her stomach, she cannot tell if the three red digits on her alarm clock, 7.36, refer to nighttime or daytime” (4). She imagines this vast movement across time and space while lying completely immobile, beneath the ground, in the dark. Idora’s corporeal immobility is linked to her recollection of, and her desire to forget “the Island where she was born” thus marking a continuity between her current immobility in Canada and the promises of diasporic mobility. Like the black trees in the park Idora is physically immobile yet her imagination expresses a longing for mobility.

The simultaneous longing for movement and the feeling of immobility that animate the opening pages of More characterize Austin Clarke’s recent work. Like most of Clarke’s characters, Idora is one of The Survivors of the Crossing (1964) such that she has survived the crossing from the Caribbean to Canada and now struggles to survive in Canada. Crossing is a major theme throughout Clarke’s work both in terms of the mixing and hybridizing of identity and in the ongoing movement, transference, and mobility of the diaspora. Indeed, these two forms of crossing are inseparable and are at the heart of Clarke’s expression of diasporic double-consciousness. Yet the title of Clarke’s first novel also historicizes contemporary forms of movement by linking current day, transnational and diasporic movement with the forced crossings of the Middle Passage and slavery. Clarke’s texts reveal how contemporary patterns of crossing are produced by historical forms of forced movement. Against celebrations of transnational movement, global citizenship, and diasporic life, Clarke’s work shows how
contemporary movement remains, for black people in the diaspora, structured by the corporeal mobility and psychic immobility that defined the movements of the Middle Passage and the spaces of the plantation and the colony. While Idora has physically moved across continents, she has yet to arrive as a Canadian. Like Brand, Clarke’s work undercuts the promises of modernity and multiculturalism by tracing the presence of the past of slavery, the Middle Passage and colonialism in the contemporary chronotopes of black diasporic life. His characters continue to feel social immobility in Canada as they are abjected from the nation or penned in by constricting stereotypes of blackness. As in Brand’s depiction of the traumas and absences of slavery and the Middle Passage, Clarke is concerned with the manner in which the historical immobilities of slavery and colonialism continue to be felt in contemporary black diasporic life. Clarke’s work eschews the fantasies of violent escape from these structures of immobility, detailing, instead, what it means to occupy the paradoxical and double position of being at once physically mobile while feeling the effects of social and psychic paralysis. As such, Clarke’s work reveals how the structures of psychic immobility persist, albeit in new forms, for black people despite the promises of Canadian multiculturalism.

Clarke’s chronotopes of black diasporic movement blacken Canada by reversing the process of inclusion. Canada finds itself within the black diaspora rather than the black diaspora clamouring to enter the space of the nation. His characters have not crossed-over but continue to engage in ongoing acts of cultural and spatial crossing with Canada. Clarke’s depiction of movement transforms Canada from a site of arrival and freedom for black people, to one more

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27 Martin Delany describes in *Blake* (1859) the “long-talked of and much-loved Canada” of African-Americans who sing, “All uniting in chorus”: “O righteous Father / Wilt thou not pity me; / And aid me on to Canada, / where fugitives are free” (143). Delany undercuts this depiction of Canada as a land of racial equality and escape from slavery, explaining later in the text that it is a country where privileges were denied him which are common to the slave in every Southern state” (153). Despite Delany’s (and others’)
route within the diaspora. Furthermore, Clarke’s inscription of movement and crossing reveals the ongoing abjection of black people from the nation as they are repeatedly imagined as en-route, originating and belonging elsewhere, an elsewhere to which they will eventually return. The mobility and crossing of diasporic life is at once the source of its vibrancy and vitality as well as a reason for black people’s abjection from the nation. Clarke’s work inserts, in Rinaldo Walcott’s terms, a detour in the “difficult journey … to citizenship” (Gilroy, *Black Atlantic* 31) in Canada. Walcott writes that the detour is “a method for thinking through the circuitous routes of black diasporic cultures … Detours are the (un)acknowledged routes and roots of black expressive cultures and … [are] both an improvisatory and an in-between space which black diasporic cultures occupy” (*Black Like Who* 31). Clarke’s characters’ experience of physical mobility and psychic immobility evinces their double-consciousness.

Clarke’s work aligns itself with Gilroy’s premise that “The fundamental injunction” of the black diaspora is “to ‘Keep On Moving’” (*Black Atlantic* 16), but rejects the conclusion that Gilroy draws from it, that the injunction to move is evidence of a “restlessness of spirit which makes … diaspora culture vital” (16). Rather, Clarke historicizes these chronotopes and contemporary forms of diasporic movement, showing how they are not a spiritual condition but an effect of black people’s psychic and social immobility in Canada. The chronotopes of the ship, the train, and the automobile reveal the continuities between the spaces of the plantation, the colony, the city, and the nation. His inscription of movement reveals how black diasporic people cannot be at rest within the multicultural nation but, despite their corporeal mobility, continue to experience psychic immobility in the everyday sites of the bar, the street, the train, and the subway. If Gilroy is right to suggest that the chronotopes of black diasporic writing detail “the

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criticisms, the symbolic resonance of Canada as the land of freedom for black people and as an escape from slavery has lasted and has been actively promoted by the Canadian state.
difficult journey from slave ship to citizenship” (*Black Atlantic* 31), then Clarke’s employment of those chronotopes insists that any such journey remains ongoing, that black people in Canada have not arrived as full citizens but continue their journeying and crossing.

Critical interest in Austin Clarke’s work has undergone a resurgence ever since he won the Giller Prize for his novel *The Polished Hoe* (2002). Previously neglected texts from Clarke’s long career have, as a consequence, been reread as early examples of a burgeoning post-thematic, black Canadian literary corpus. Yet, with the exception of a few critics, Clarke scholarship has largely overlooked the formal and literary qualities of Clarke’s writing, focusing instead on the way in which Clarke’s texts “open up the possibility of cross-cultural alliances” (Casteel 132), reveal “the physical underside of urban life in Canada” (Craig 90) or “illuminate some of the blind spots of multiculturalism” (Chariandy 143). Many of George Elliott Clarke’s criticisms of Brand scholarship can be applied to recent criticism of Austin Clarke’s work. Clarke’s rewriting of the chronotopes of the black diaspora links his thematic and political concerns. Clarke repeatedly describes the crossing of national and geographic borders as well as the traversal of cities, and neighbourhoods, even tracing the cramped inhabiting of domestic spaces. Clarke is interested in both the dream of movement that motivates the lives of his characters as well as the new and troubling forms that the dream assumes in Canada. While Dionne Brand conceives of diasporic life temporally, of the political conditions and subjectivities “to come,” Clarke is primarily concerned with the spatial coordinates of identity and mobility. Clarke does not share

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28See, for instance, Michael Bucknor (2005) and Heike Härting (2004).
29Michael Bucknor makes this point about early readers of Clarke’s work, arguing that “the history of early Clarke criticism exposes a critical enterprise limited to representationalist assumptions of mimeticism and aestheticism … generally Clarke’s work has been limited to readings addressing the authenticity of representation in it” (141). Bucknor’s comments on early Clarke scholarship continue to be true of much contemporary Clarke criticism which is largely interested in the manner in which Clarke represents Canadian multicultural realities before they were enshrined in Canadian law and cultural mythos.
Brand’s optimism for transformation through interpolation. The "inexpressible" routes and roots of black culture remain Clarke's focus, without utopian dreams of community, but with momentary glimpses, in the narrative present, of camaraderie and congregation.

"Sometimes, A Motherless Child" (1992), *The Origin of Waves* (1997), *The Polished Hoe* (2002) and *More* (2008) engage in a blackening of Canada by representing the putting down of roots within nation as the traversing of routes across nation and diaspora. As such, Clarke’s writing of the chronotopes of the black diaspora affects a number of different registers of black diasporic life in Canada. In “Sometimes, A Motherless Child,” Clarke depicts young black masculinity in Canada by contrasting the chronotope of the automobile with the immobility of the space of the jail cell. In his depiction of young and older black men, Clarke reveals how the longing for social mobility is expressed in black men’s physical movement and is circumvented by the criminalization of black masculinity. In *The Origin of Waves*, Clarke depicts how older black men’s desire for social mobility is not fulfilled by their physical movements. He depicts older black masculine movement with images of an inner tube afloat at sea, a corpse that washes up on a beach, boats with no sails and city streets covered in slippery ice. These images express the kind of aimless and precarious journey undertaken by this older generation of ex-colonial black diasporic men. Clarke’s texts broaden their scope from the sole consideration of the meaning of movement for the construction of masculinity to the pernicious combination of corporeal mobility and psychic immobility in black diasporic life. This shift to mobility in a general sense links his work with past theorizations of movement in the black diaspora as he reveals how the paralysis of the spaces of the plantation and the colony persist in these new diasporic sites. The subway, the government office, the bus, the police station, and the city street replace the barracks, the plantation, the jail and the train of Fanon’s colonial imagination. These
latter texts contrast the promises of reinvention and social mobility made by Canadian multiculturalism with the social paralysis that black people continue to experience in Canada.

Even before the publication of Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* (1993) and the subsequent emergence of the Atlantic, the ship, and the figure of the exile as the definitive images of black modernity, the significance of movement, dislocation, exile and relocation has not been lost on black writers. The importance of Gilroy’s work to articulations of diasporic and transnational black subjectivity, particularly in his discussion of the chronotope of the ship, is immeasurable. Gilroy insists on the importance of movements, political and geographical, to his articulation of diasporic black subjectivity, but his work, somewhat anachronistically, does not engage with the work of Fanon despite the central importance of movement to Fanon’s work.\(^{30}\) I detour from a, perhaps obvious, reading of Clarke via Gilroy and instead suggest that Clarke’s depiction of (im)mobility is most clearly brought into focus by reading his texts alongside the work of Fanon. Gilroy’s analysis of the transnational chronotope of the ship is complemented by Fanon’s analysis of the national and colonial chronotope of the train and the spatial configuration of race within the colony. While Gilroy focuses on figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Martin Delany,\(^{31}\) I suggest that a critical reading of Fanon’s major works reveals the importance of movement to his theorization of colonial power. Further, my reading of Fanon in conversation

\(^{30}\)Gilroy justifies his decision thus: “There are also obvious omissions [in his text]. I have said virtually nothing about the lives, theorists, and political activities of Frantz Fanon and C.L.R. James, the two best-known black Atlantic thinkers. Their lives fit readily into the pattern or movement, transformation, and relocation that I have described. But they are already well known if not as widely read as they should be and other people have begun the labour of introducing their writings into contemporary critical theory” (xi). One could also add Marcus Garvey to the list of black thinkers for whom movement is centrally important but who are not considered by Gilroy.

\(^{31}\)Despite Gilroy’s reading of Delany, he is criticized by George Elliott Clarke for his broader erasure of Canada from the map of the Black Atlantic. George Elliott Clarke writes that within Gilroy’s theory, “Canada, as a subject space, is patently absent. [Gilroy] never registers it as a site of New World African enslavement, immigration, emigration, anti-racist struggle, and cultural imagination … Hence his *Black Atlantic* is really a vast Bermuda Triangle into which Canada – read as British North America or Nouvelle-France or even as an American satellite – vanishes” (*Odysseys* 9).
with Clarke’s inscription of movement shows the continued presence of colonial forms of power and immobility within the nation state. Fanon’s colonial subject longs for the forms of corporeal movement that are commonplace for Clarke’s diasporic subject. Yet the accompanying social and psychic movement that Fanon’s colonial subject dreams of remains absent for Clarke’s diasporic subject. Clarke’s writing of the chronotopes of mobility reveals how Fanon’s colonial subject’s expression of the dream of social mobility becomes the nightmare of diasporic immobility. Fanon's colonial subject might dream of a violent ending to the colony that will restore his psychic and social mobility, but such an escape from immobility is impossible for Clarke’s characters. Clarke’s work shows how the spaces of the bar, the police station, and the government office are as immobilizing for Clarke’s diasporic characters as they are for Fanon’s colonial subject.

The double-consciousness of black diasporic subjectivity and the depiction of black subjects “torn asunder” is a common thread throughout Clarke’s and Fanon’s works. Indeed, Fanon begins Black Skin, White Masks (1952) with a description of double-consciousness that continues to be true of Clarke’s diasporic characters: “The black man possesses two dimensions: one with his fellow Blacks, the other with the Whites. ... There is no doubt that this fissiparousness is a direct consequence of the colonial undertaking” (17). Fanon’s “fissiparousness” recalls Du Bois’s subject “torn asunder” and this tearing pervades Clarke’s depiction of diasporic double-consciousness in Canada. Unlike Gilroy who sees this doubleness as evidence of a “restlessness of spirit which makes … diaspora culture vital” (16), Fanon insists that it “is a direct consequence of the colonial undertaking” (17). In both Black Skin, White Masks and The Wretched of the Earth (1961), Fanon argues that the colonial regime’s manichean organization of space is complemented by and supplements the enforced immobility of the
colonial subject. He argues that the colonial regime produces a physically and psychically immobilized colonial subject. Clarke, like Fanon, reveals the connection between black people’s felt psychic and social immobility and the social order. In what follows, I show how movement was a central concern of both the spatial and psychological arrangement of the colonial world. Clarke transfers this colonial organization of space to the multicultural nation in which his characters are neither free nor mobile.

Fanon begins *The Wretched of the Earth* with the section on “Violence” which imagines and justifies an eruption of aggression against the enforced immobility of the colonial order. Fanon argues that “The colonial world is a compartmentalized world. … The colonized world is a world divided in two. The dividing line, the border, is represented by the barracks and the police stations” (3). For Fanon, restriction of movement is one of the defining features of the colonial world where the numerous physical and psychological divisions between colonizer and colonized not only maintain but define the colonial order. Fanon offers an extended description of the relationship between mobility and colonial power, arguing that the colonial world is “A world compartmentalized, Manichean and petrified, a world of statues: the statue of the general who led the conquest, the statue of the engineer who built the bridge. A world cocksure of itself, crushing with its stoniness the backbones of those scarred by the whip. That is the colonial world” (*Wretched* 15). Fanon’s description of the colonial world as “a world of statues” excoriates the monumental history of colonialism which enshrines the achievements of the colonizer at the expense of the historical obliteration of the colonized. The petrifaction of history marked by the image of the statue is linked with the petrified (in the sense of terrified) colonial subject under the colonial regime and it is this sense of mutually enforcing petrification – immobility and terror – that constitutes the double-bind of immobility in the colonial world. In his lecture “Racism and
Culture,” Fanon describes this double-bind as a social activity that “betrays a determination to objectify, to confine, to imprison, to harden. Phrases such as ‘I know them,’ ‘that’s the way they are,’ show this maximum objectification successfully achieved” (44). Fanon identifies a continuity between the physical and psychic structures of immobility in the colonial world. The material immobilities of the checkpoint, the barracks and the police station are supplemented by the ideological power of stereotype and race. Where the dominant culture displays qualities “of dynamism, of growth, of depth” the colonized subject is socially, physically and psychically petrified, objectified and penned-in by the colonial regime. Like the colonial subjects who are immobilized, the colonized “culture once living and open to the future, becomes closed, fixed in the colonial status, caught in the yoke of oppression. ... The cultural mummification leads to a mummification of individual thinking” (“Racism and Culture” 44). Whereas Gilroy’s analysis of movement focuses on the imagery of mobility, ships, pullman porters, trains and the ocean, Fanon considers the explicit images of colonial immobility: barracks, police stations, chains and statues as monuments to the psychic immobility of the colonial system.

Linking Gilroy’s attention to the chronotopes of the black Atlantic with Fanon’s discussion of the immobility of the colony can reveal both the pleasures of mobility and the pain of enforced immobility in a nuanced account of black diasporic mobility. Gilroy justifies his decision to employ the metaphor of the ship as the chronotope of the Black Atlantic:

I have settled on the image of ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean as a central organizing symbol for this enterprise and as my starting point. The image of the ship – a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion – is especially important for historical and theoretical reasons … Ships
immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for
redemptive return to an Africa homeland (*Black Atlantic* 4)

The ship is neither entirely, wholly, within Africa nor is it entirely within the New World. Rather, the ship is located within the Middle Passage, situated in a violent, traumatic, forced, yet also “syncretic” (3) and productive in-betweenness. Gilroy’s employment of the ship as a central chronotope of black modernity supports his “suggestion that cultural historians could take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective” (15). Gilroy’s privileging of the Atlantic “as one single, complex unit of analysis” re-reads the violence of the Middle Passage as a possibly productive, syncretic, mobile and liquid site that speaks to the complexities of black modernity. While Gilroy’s argument is crucial, his analysis needs to be supplemented with a consideration of those forms of enforced immobility and division that restrict these syncretic acts of invention and self-making. Gilroy is well aware of the violence committed against black people in the diaspora, but his privileging of the ship, ocean and mobility needs to be complemented by Fanon’s analysis of the enforced immobility of the colonial world and the nation under colonial rule. Indeed Gilroy’s attention to transnationality and syncretism is modified by Fanon’s attention to the importance of borders (national and racial), immobility and the manicheanism of the colonial world. Whereas Gilroy sees the “fundamental injunction” of black diasporic life as a call to “Keep On Moving” (16), Fanon insists that those movements are not always possible, desired or voluntary. Furthermore, Gilroy’s analysis of movement remains largely at the level of the trope whereas Fanon’s analysis of colonial immobility describes the political, psychic and corporeal effects of immobility on the colonial subject. Fanon’s depiction of mobility and immobility operates at the level of the flesh and psyche to indicate how colonial
Manichean isolation isolates the colonial subject from his or her body. Fanon’s analysis fills in that space between what Gilroy describes as “the difficult journey from slave ship to citizenship” (31), offering a reading of the colonial order in which the physical and psychic immobility of the colonial subject is paramount.

Fanon’s analysis of the immobility of colonial society extends not only to the social arrangement of the colony but also connects the physical and psychic immobilizations of the colonial subject that are generated by that colonial order. He describes the double bind of immobility as it is felt by the colonial subject:

The colonial subject is a man penned in; apartheid is but one method of compartmentalizing the colonial world. The first thing the colonial subject learns is to remain in his place and not overstep its limits. Hence the dreams of the colonial subject are muscular dreams, dreams of action, dreams of aggressive vitality. I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, and climbing. I dream I burst out laughing, I am leaping across a river and chased by a pack of cars that never catches up with me. During colonization the colonized subject frees himself night after night between nine in the evening and six in the morning. (Black Skin 15)

Here, Fanon agrees with Gilroy’s argument that the “fundamental injunction” of the black diaspora is to “Keep On Moving” yet Fanon emphasizes the missing element in Gilroy’s affirmation of mobility – the colonial subject’s “muscular dreams” are not inherent to the formation of black modernity, but rather a response to the immobility of the colonial order. The desired movement of the colonial subject, then, is not an inherent quality in black modernity but rather a response to the enforced immobility of slavery, racism and the colony. As Neil Lazarus points out, “Fanon’s concept of the ‘native’ or the ‘Negro’ is not to be thought of as merely
describe of independently existing (African) subjects. This is a point absolutely insisted upon by Fanon: he notes time and again that the figure of the native is not autochthonous, but is rather a construct of colonialism – actually, of the settler” (169; italics in original). Lazarus’s reading demonstrates that the repressive immobility of the colonial world both produces and is resisted through the colonial subject’s dreams of bodily aggressiveness, physical movement and vitality. Indeed, Fanon’s description of “The immobility to which the native is condemned” (Wretched 51) indicates the way in which this immobility is an effect of the subject position of “native” produced by colonization. Another effect of this production of the “native” under colonialism are the “muscular dreams, dreams of action, dreams of aggressive vitality” whereby the colonial subject imagines intense bodily movements that counteract the imposed immobility of the colonial order. Fanon therefore insists that this fantasy of movement is an ambivalent one, both an effect of and resistance against the enforced immobility of the colonial order, but no less felt and empowering for being so.

Clarke’s depiction of black immobility in Canada reveals how Fanon’s dream of violently casting off the structures of immobility is impossible for black diasporic people in Canada. Indeed, Fanon’s fantasy of the mobility of the colonial subject is rewritten by Clarke in More. At the outset of the novel, Idora is described as “Coming out of the dream” (1), which she recalls later that morning:

The sadness weighs upon her spirit as she tries to call to mind the dream that the ringing of the bells interrupted; and she remembers now how the dream turned terrible. There was a line of men, like soldiers on a march in a green pasture, passing her, in single file, with tall thin-bodied trees surrounding them, and that gave no shade. The horror of her dream, when she got close to the line of soldiers, all black men, and who seemed to be
the age of her own son, was that they all had their right hands cut off, clean-clean, at the wrists. And she thought the end of the ringing of the bells ... was like the sudden, final slashes of a cutlass. All the men were tied to one another, by rope ... And she wondered what was the reason for cutting off their right hands. Were they all left handed? And now she remembered. The man at the head of the single file of captured soldiers was ‘that man,’ her husband, Bertram, only younger. And the man at the rear, a boy, was her son, Barrington James. (22 - 3)

Idora’s complicated dream inverts Fanon’s claim that “the colonized subject frees himself night after night between nine in the evening and six in the morning” as here the dream is not one of liberation, movement and agency but rather one of fear, anxiety, violence and repression. While Fanon’s dreaming is full of possibility, Idora’s multi-layered dream “turned terrible,” becoming a nightmare of immobility, racism, control and powerlessness. The barren trees that Idora recalls at the start of the novel take on new connotations as she specifically links the line of black men with the “tall thin-bodied trees surrounding them.” The difference between Fanon’s and Idora’s dreams expresses the shift from the dreams of the colonial subject to the dreams of the post-colonial, diasporic subject.32 I argue that Idora’s dream can be read in contrast to the “muscular dream” of the colonial subject. Fanon argues that the dreams of the colonial subject are composed of “jumping, swimming, running, and climbing. I dream I burst out laughing, I am leaping across a river and chased by a pack of cars that never catches up with me.” In Idora’s dream, however, the mobility of the colonial subject is replaced by the immobility of black men who have their right hands cut off and are tied together, marching like prisoners. Strangely, the dreams of

32 The shift from Fanon’s dream to Idora’s nightmare could also be read as evidence of David Scott’s argument in *Conscripts of Modernity* (2004) that “we live in tragic times” (210) and that “almost everywhere, the anticolonial utopias have gradually withered into postcolonial nightmares” (2).
mobility which offer the promise of agency to the colonial subject are replaced by the diasporic
subject’s nightmare of corporeal immobility and powerlessness. If the dream of movement is
produced as an effect of occupying the subject position of the colonized then Idora’s nightmare of
immobility is similarly an expression of what it means to be black in Canada. The moving,
muscular and energetic body in Fanon’s dream is replaced by the disciplined, criminalized and
brutalized black male body of Idora’s nightmare. Idora’s nightmare reveals how the structures of
physical and psychic immobility that defined Fanon’s colonial world have not eroded but have
persisted in new forms.

Idora’s dream indicates the specific manner in which black men in Canada are
immobilized by state violence and endemic racism. While Fanon’s subject is always male,
Clarke’s narrating of the nightmare from Idora’s perspective enables him to differentiate between
the effects of psychic immobility on black men and women. Thus Clarke’s narrating of the
chronotopes of the black diaspora are gendered such that Idora’s immobility is felt as a “sadness”
that “weighs upon her spirit,” whereas the men in her life are physically and violently
immobilized. Idora’s retelling of her nightmare reveals her anxieties about her son, her husband
and about black men more generally. Idora’s dream and her observations of black men
throughout the novel at once reveal the particular forms of immobility to which black men are
consigned and also reveal her own complicity in viewing black male bodies as criminal. While
she recognizes the vulnerability of the black male body in Canadian society, she is also complicit
with the dominant perspective that views black men as threats to social order. Certainly Idora’s
dream signifies the manner in which the black male body is still a locus of power and control, and
Idora worries about the enforced immobility of her son and “that man” in Canada. Idora’s dream
represents one of her many fears about her son and the stereotypes of, and violence committed
against, black male youth to which she fears he is succumbing. Later in the chapter the narrator observes, “She has been thinking about her son: hoping he would stop dressing like a rapper” (24) and as she watches her son in a park, she recalls her dream and “the tableau of frightened black bodies ... They are bent in fear and in fatigue” (24). It is unclear whether the “frightened black bodies” are the figures in the park or in the dream. Idora is vividly aware of the violence that is committed against young black men in a racist society and she continually worries about the very real physical violence to which her son is exposed. Idora’s concerns over black masculinity and her feeling that there is an absence of men in her life (her husband leaves her and BJ is rarely present at home or in the novel) pervades the novel.31

When Idora witnesses a black man picking through her garbage she thinks “He was a black man! A black man! … The garbage-thief is a black man! It make my heart bleed . . . ‘You come to that?’ I shout at him. ‘You don’t know you are a black man? You come to this? You lost your dignities” (99; ellipses in original)? Idora’s repetition of the phrase “black man” indicates the depth of the crisis of black masculinity that she is attempting to articulate. Idora's repeated taunt to the "garbage-thief," "You don't know you are a black man" is also a lament that black men fail to live up to their name. Later in the novel, Idora describes her worries as she observes her son in the park:

She feels surrounded by her worries, quarried like an animal being hunted down; and disgusted, in her loneliness, with her son, as she would try, on many nights to locate him in the Park across the street from the apartment … And when she can pick him out from the cluster of his friends, she can see only parts of his body: sometimes his head;

31 Clarke originally planned to title the novel “Where Are The Men” (private interview)? This title comes from Bill Cosby’s famous rant about the absence of black men in African-American families and is part of a long history of critiquing the allegedly fatherless, African-American family.
sometimes his legs; sometimes his torso; as if he is cut into pieces, like a side of beef, rendered headless, legless, through the dexterity of a cleaver on the carcass of a slaughtered cow. (23 – 4)

Yet Idora’s observation of BJ reveals her own bias and the manner in which she has naturalized a particular depiction of black men. Looking for BJ, Idora attempts to “pick him out from a cluster of friends” as if he were part of a police lineup or an undifferentiated group of young men whose very presence is read as criminal. Idora’s gaze is already aligned with the dominant gaze that reads black men as criminal and threatening. Her worries about her son reveal the manner in which black men are socially and psychically immobilized through stereotypes of criminality and the manner in which Idora herself is complicit in those stereotypes. Phanuel Antwi has argued that “the journey from being a regular black male subject to the black male subject under duress is a short distance” (194; italics in original). He goes on to comment on precisely the immobilizing effect of this criminalizing and stereotyping of black men: “Because we do not quite know when we will become the suspicious black (male) subject under the eye of the law or when we will escape the fishbowl phenomenon of being watched, many of our movements tend to be calculated and guarded, so guarded that each movement seems strangely immobile” (194).

Idora’s gaze links this criminalization and vulnerability of the black male body, read as a series of disconnected parts, or as part of a cluster of blackness, with the immobility of black male subjectivity evinced in the stereotypes of black masculinity. Idora’s pseudo-panoptic watching of her son, along with Antwi’s depiction of the “fishbowl phenomenon” indicates the structures of

34 Perhaps one of the limitations of Clarke’s texts is the attention he pays to the vulnerability of black male bodies at the expense of the vulnerability of black women’s bodies. Throughout Clarke’s narratives, black women fear that they will lose their identity, their decency and their dignity whereas black men are faced with far more corporeal threats. In this instance, Idora imagines herself as trapped by the forces of class, spatial configurations of race and structural racism, but she worries that her son will be the victim of a far more explicit and corporeal form of violence by the police or other black men.
observation that transforms BJ into “the black male subject under duress.” Both her dream of BJ’s punishment and her observations of BJ in the park reveal the pervasiveness of the discourse of black male criminality. Clarke’s depiction of BJ’s immobility at once comments on the depiction of young black men as criminal and problematic and also reveals the difficulty of observing and depicting black men outside that logic of surveillance and criminalization.

This tension between Clarke’s depiction of black men’s desire for mobility and the structures of immobilizing stereotype and criminalization is also present in Clarke’s short story “Sometimes, A Motherless Child” (1993) which focuses on BJ from a number of different perspectives. In this story BJ realizes Fanon’s dream of mobility as he drives through Toronto in a BMW but his physical mobility is undercut by structures of surveillance and criminalization. In this short story the narrative is told from a number of different perspectives, including that of BJ, his mother, white people who observe him, and the police. The multiple narrators and shifts in focalization in this story display the contrast between BJ’s own sense of mobility and the forms of social immobility that confine and trap him, as it does his own movement from subject/agent to victim. This story, along with some of Clarke’s other short stories (“I’m Running For My Life,” “Don’t Shoot!”), forms the outline of the plot of More. In the story BJ and his friend Marco have won money at the race track and purchase a white BMW with the license plate “BLUE” (the name of the horse that they gambled on). The movement in this narrative is largely organized around BJ’s pleasure in driving his BMW across the city and the feeling of status and agency the BMW confers. The bulk of the narrative focuses on BJ and Marco as they drive around the city, but also includes the observations of two white women who believe BJ has stolen the car and police officers who follow and arrest BJ and Marco. The narrator comments,
The BMW took the first entrance on to the 401 West doing eighty. BJ settled behind the wheel, with an unfiltered Gauloise cigarette dangling at the corner of his mouth, one eye closed against the smoke, and he put the car into fourth gear, and the car still had some more power left, and it moved like a jungle animal measuring its prey, and exerting additional power because of the certainty of devouring its prey. ... It was simply that BJ liked to drive fast. (346) 

The narrative details the movement of the BMW and the pleasure that BJ takes in driving the BMW and indeed one suspects that Clarke takes as much pleasure in writing this masculine movement as BJ takes in driving the vehicle. There is a sense of masculine agency in this passage particularly in the way that the car signifies the kind of power that BJ desires. The car signifies BJ's new-found power but it is important to note that the subject of the first sentence is not BJ but rather “The BMW.” Similarly, it is the car that “still had some more power left” and “moved like a jungle animal” rather than BJ. This displacement of the agency of movement from BJ onto the vehicle suggests that despite owning the vehicle, BJ and Marco will never be able to access the physical and social mobility that they believe the car offers them.

The narrator describes the pleasure BJ and Marco experience as they drive through the city: “cruising along Eglinton Avenue, passing record stores from which reggae and dancehall blared out upon them, past barbershops and restaurants and shops which sold curry goat and fish and oxtail and peas and rice, and they felt they could smell and taste the food even in this breathless afternoon” (349). Their cruising across the city, particularly as it makes the city

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35 It is this kind of prose, pervasive throughout Austin Clarke’s writing, that leads George Elliott Clarke to playfully suggest that “Perusing Austin Chesterfield Clarke’s short stories, one catches, now and then, the distinctive odour of the entertaining and tawdry James Bond spy adventures … both authors stud their pages with references to pricey autos and shapely women … Conceivably, if Fleming were still alive, he would make an apt partner for Clarke in one of those racially two-toned, ‘buddy’ films that Hollywood insists we must have” (*Odysseys* 238).
register their presence, is a realization of Fanon’s dream of mobility. Gilroy has analyzed the chronotope of the automobile in his most recent collection of essays *Darker Than Blue: On the Moral Economies of Black Atlantic Culture* (2010). In his analysis of Ralph Ellison’s “Cadillac Flambé” he argues that Ellison makes a “clear distinction between the traditional means of self-making – the technology of the free black self – and the forms of freedom involved in consuming objects which, though you have chosen them for yourself, effectively come to dominate you” (19). This leads Gilroy to suggest that appeals to agency via automobiles constitute nothing more than “automobile citizenship ... a kind of giant armoured bed on wheels that can shout out the driver’s dwindling claims upon the world into dead public space at ever-increasing volume” (48).

Yet there is no “clear distinction” between the “traditional means of self-making” and a pseudo-freedom via consumption in Clarke’s works, where acts of freedom and agency are often tied to material acquisition. BJ’s and Marco’s driving across the city is a form of self-making in that it gives them access to a sense of agency and power that they otherwise do not possess. Their "cruising" also constitutes a form of blackening because they remap the city from a black, diasporic perspective: “As BJ pulled away from the curb in front of the subway station, in the East End, with Marco strapped in beside him, and laughing and turning up the volume of the saxophone solo, the BMW was so loud with the music contained within it, that Marco himself felt his head was about to explode” (346). John Coltrane’s "A Love Supreme" accompanies their drive across the city; BJ and Marco “remained quiet in the waves of this melodious tune they both liked so much ... BJ insisted ... that it was a religious chant. Marco, equally insistent, said it was a love song” (349). Both Coltrane’s four-part “musical narration” and the short story are at once celebrations and elegies. Kamau Brathwaite has argued that “Jazz … continues to be, the perfect expression for the rootless, ‘cultureless’, truly ex-patriate Negro … What determines the shape
and direction of a jazz performance … is the nature of its improvisation” (336 – 7). The parallelism between BJ’s movement in the BMW and Coltrane’s “musical narration” suggests that BJ is not participating in some form of diminished agency but rather that his movement is a form of performance and improvisation, that his driving across the city forges new paths, mimicking the circuitous routes by which black Canadians come to claim Canada as their own.

While BJ and Marco are able to practise the physical movement that Fanon longed for, the structures of psychic and social immobility continue to persist. This mobility which is such a source of pleasure to BJ and Marco, is undermined in the narrative when they are followed and later stopped by the police. The narrator explains that as BJ drives,

he did not know that, as soon as he had pulled away from the subway at Steeles, at that precise moment, a blue sedan, with two men in it, had pulled away too, and had followed him ... The marked police cruiser was expecting him. And as he swooshed by, the traffic policeman was on the radio to another one, somewhere farther west along the 401.

Conversation passed between the policemen in the cars. ‘Drug dealers for sure!’ (347)

The fishbowl phenomenon described by Antwi is rendered palpable here in these multiple observations that rely on naturalized stereotypes of black masculinity. When the police officer discovers that they are not drug dealers and did not steal the BMW, he drives them around the city trying to decide what to do with them. As the policeman drives them around the city, BJ “recognized 52 Division police station. And his heart sank. He had heard about 52 Division. Wasn’t it a police officer from 52 Division who had shot a Jamaican, many years ago? ... Apart from the crackling of voices from the other, invisible policemen and dispatchers, the cruiser was quiet” (352). BJ’s and Marco’s ride in the BMW across the city is filled with a sense of possibility in the sounds and smells of Toronto, whereas this ride in the back of the police cruiser...
is silent and filled with fear and the threat of violence. The narrator explains that BJ “said nothing. And Marco said nothing. Marco had been slapping his trouser legs. BJ sat with his eyes closed, his teeth pressed down tight” (353). The short sentences of this section mirror BJ’s and Marco’s immobility within the police cruiser. Indeed, the suspect form of mobility where they move across the city while being immobilized within the police cruiser stresses the forms of suspect movement that repeatedly affects black men in Clarke’s work. This second drive through the city contrasts with the first to highlight the curtailing of BJ’s improvised movement through the city and the social immobility of black men in Canada. The first drive through the city is written as a mélange of the sounds, smells and pleasures of black life in Toronto, while this second drive is silent but for the voices of the “other, invisible policemen.” Here the invisible presence of racial profiling, surveillance and the criminalization of youth remap Toronto from the perspective of a criminalized black man. This immobility is also present later when BJ is alone in a police cell and is described as having “paced up and down, not having enough length in the square space to make his pacing more dramatic, and less of pathos. ... he again realized the restriction of the square space” (359). The story concludes with BJ being killed by the police, an event that is foreshadowed by a nightmare in which he screams ‘Don’t shoot, don’t shoot!’ There was terror in his pleading” (329). Fanon’s dream of mobility is once again transformed into the nightmare of state violence. BJ does not have the same dreams as Fanon’s colonial male subject, yet his dreams, hopes and fears are still conditioned by the themes that Fanon illuminates. Clarke’s narratives demonstrate how the desire for agency in the face of immobilizing power persists, in new forms, for young black men. In More and “Sometimes, A Motherless Child” Clarke reveals how, despite the physical movement of diasporic life, the psychic immobility that defined the plantation and the colony continue to persist.
If Clarke’s works thus far have focused on state power’s immobilizing effects on young black men, his novels that feature older black men, depicting a generational divide between figures of black masculinity, shift the emphasis to the construction of masculinity itself. The depiction of these older black diasporic men is less focused on the vulnerability of the body and more concerned with a crisis of masculinity that they experience in Canada. Clarke communicates the repetition and change between generations of black men in his deployment of different chronotopes for each – ship and ocean versus automobile and police cruiser. Clarke repeatedly suggests that colonial men’s desire to move is part of their desire to assert themselves as men, to stake out a new identity and territory of their own. As Daniel Coleman has shown in *Masculine Migrations* (1998) the projects of migration and of asserting one’s masculinity are often intimately linked. Coleman argues that masculinities undergo a process of “cross-cultural refraction” (3; italics in original) in the act of migration. Clarke’s older characters often express the failings of migration as the failings of masculinity. The project of becoming a man is, for many of Clarke’s colonial men, dependent on leaving home and nation and making a successful life abroad. In *The Polished Hoe*, for instance, Constable Percy describes the trip he took from the island of Bimshire in a boat as akin to the feeling that Columbus and Sir Francis Drake and Lord Nelson ... mustta had when they was sailing the high seas. A feeling that I was on top, that I was conquering something or somebody. That I was moving along. Just moving along. From one place to the next. ... I am sure that Sir Francis Drake and Lord Nelson, and those other sea dogs, must have had the same feeling of power of moving along. (251)

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36 Clarke discusses the violence committed against young, black men in Canada in his non-fictional work *Public Enemies: Police Violence and Black Youth* (1992).
“On top” and “conquering something or somebody” indicate how the thrill of movement is, for Percy, a distinctly masculine thrill while his allusion to Columbus and Francis Drake suggests that this male desire for movement is an emulation, of sorts, of the colonial male archetypes. If, as Fanon suggests, the colonial world is a “world of statues,” the statue of Francis Drake in the centre of Percy’s village has impressed itself upon Percy such that he cannot imagine movement outside of that colonial context. This desire to assert one’s masculinity through movement inevitably fails, as it is undercut by racism, stereotypes and limited opportunities in new countries. Percy’s power and agency are, for instance, undercut when he feels simultaneously “collared and encircled, … surrounded by sea and sharks” (326). This failure of mobility is also a key theme in Clarke’s short story “Canadian Experience” (1986), in which an unnamed protagonist has his first job interview in five years but is unable to bring himself to attend the interview. The link between masculinity and migration is evident in the protagonist’s decision to live in Canada against his father’s wishes. At the end of the story the pressures of migration and life in Canada prove to be too much and the protagonist kills himself by jumping in front of a subway car. As he dies, he thinks of the elevator in the office building where his interview was scheduled: “How comfortable and safe and brave he had felt travelling and laughing and falling so fast and so free” (39). The comfort and safety of his movement in the elevator is juxtaposed with the danger and impending violence of the subway car. Both pleasure, linked to the promises of reinvention, and pain and disappointment in the social immobility that these men experience in Canada, characterize Clarke’s work.

37 The title of the story is surely a reference to the repeated claim that black men from the Caribbean (and other immigrants) are not suited to working in Canada because they lack “Canadian experience.” As Idora explains, “She was sure that when they say ‘You do not have Canadian Experience,’ they were using the code word for ‘You black’” (13).
Clarke’s *The Origin of Waves* (1997) is exemplary in this respect as it details a day-long conversation between two best friends, Tim and John, both of whom migrate from Barbados and are left to cope with the consequences of their decisions to do so. Both men felt that migration was an essential element in asserting their masculinity yet find that transnational movement has led to their questioning and doubting themselves as men. After a chance meeting in a Toronto blizzard, the two men go to a Yonge street bar where they recount the story of their lives and try to understand their decision to migrate from Barbados. Both men experience simultaneous crises of migration and masculinity and as they recount their life stories to one another they attempt to give meaning to their decision to leave their island. The contrast between the transnational movement that they describe in their stories and their immobility in the bar during the snowstorm resonates with the suspect forms of movement that recur in Clarke’s corpus. The dream of colonial mobility is replaced, in this text, by the repetition of two of the protagonist’s childhood memories: that of his Uncle’s corpse washing up onto a beach and his recollection of watching an inner tube adrift at sea. Both images evoke movement as traumatic and involuntary and the main character imagines himself as similarly adrift. Tim’s recollection of “that inner tube drowned at sea” (24) is one of the central metaphors of the novel, conceiving of movement as aimless, ongoing, threatening and involuntary. Also, the inner tube metaphor resonates with the structure of the novel which abandons chapters in favour of a single sustained narrative sequence that takes place over the course of a day. Heike Härting argues that “Both men’s narratives … are frequently interrupted by the recurrence of the conch-shell and inner tube metaphors which, like the waves, recoil from and re-enter Tim’s and John’s narratives” (104); I would only add that John and Tim are brought together because of the circularity and repetition that dominates their failed migration and that they can ruefully turn into shared experience. Tim and John move only to find
that they arrive back where they started. Tim moves to Canada to find that that the social
conditions he tried to leave behind are present in his new location. This circularity is mirrored in
the structure of the novel itself as the narrative begins with the two men meeting in a snowstorm,
spending the bulk of the narrative retelling the events of their lives in a bar and then, after leaving
the bar, they run into one another again in the snow. The novel’s structural and thematic
circularities, the absence of any chapter breaks, and the continuous return of past memories and
anxieties all inflect the novel’s concern with movement to suggest that Tim and John continue to
arrive at the same questions and uncertainties.

The Origin of Waves begins in the voice of its first-person narrator, Tim, who remarks, “I
am walking in the snow now ... Time in this city has made this walking sail old and worn and
tattered … But I am going nowhere in particular. I have no destination ... the sail that gives me
movement is patched with words of an old song” (13 - 14). He goes on to describe his attempts to
navigate an icy Toronto street: “I stop walking, though I am unable to stand motionless, in this
snow which shifts like an uncontrollable roller skate, for too long. My shoes are sliding” (26 - 7).
The snow is an image for the pervasive whiteness that immobilizes black life in Toronto. Tim
later terms winter “the white darkness, the white darkness” (231) and his repetition of the phrase
suggests the frustrating circularity that he believes determines his life. Furthermore, Tim and
John’s emergence from the blizzard suggests the manner in which they are denied origins or
beginnings, but rather are constantly emerging, moving, and between places. Words such as
"shifting," "uncontrollable," and "sliding" reflect the contrast between emergence, transition,
betweenness, and involuntary movement and stability, destination, and belonging. The very title
of the novel captures an impossibility – how could waves know where they come from? Yet
despite the desire to move, to “swim out” and to “leave this place” (17), neither Tim nor John has a sense of precisely where he is going:

‘Where you was going when I bounced-into you?’ John says. ‘Nowhere.’ ‘A man have to go somewhere. You can’t just be walking and not going nowhere! You can’t be just going from one place to the next, and not going anywhere! You must have some direction …

‘Every day, at the same time, in any kind of weather, I leave my house and walk down Yonge Street heading straight for the Lake, and back from the Lake up again on Yonge Street and back to my house. (69; italics in original)

Tim is continually compelled to move but there is no purpose, origin or destination for his movement. Like the inner tube that haunts his memories, he feels that he is adrift and he is compelled to repeat his aimless movements with no sense of origin or destination in mind.

The novel depicts movement as involuntary and coercive such that John and Tim repeatedly imagine themselves as adrift and aimless. Yet while the plot is circular, ending as it begins, the narrative also reveals how this circularity and repetition become marked by a difference. If the novel inserts a detour into Fanon’s dream of mobility, it also shows how both men’s acts of movement constitute a form of agency. In their second meeting in the blizzard, after having discussed their lives, dreams and memories in the bar, Tim and John are changed as they gain a sense of camaraderie in their shared condition of involuntary, drifting, repetitive movement. Near the conclusion of the novel, Tim declares, “As we stand a policeman in a cruiser the same colour of the snow passes his eye over us, and continues on his way …. ‘The motherfucking Man, y’all!’ and I feel and share the glee in his voice which shivers from the cold” (234; italics in original). The subtle link between their standing, the police observation and the pervasive whiteness of snow and Canada indicates how their mobility is produced as an effect of
social immobility. The policeman is suspicious of them standing on the street and his act of surveillance carries with it the message to move along. Yet John’s dismissive and reproachful cuss becomes a means of claiming the street as his own against the blanketing whiteness. Against the state injunction to Keep On Movin’ the policeman’s gaze and “the white darkness” of Canada, John’s language produces a form of camaraderie between the two men that makes life in Canada more bearable. If the images of white snow, blizzards and white darkness deny John and Tim any origins and efface them from the Canadian physical and imaginative landscape, their use of language and their shared acts of narration and storytelling become the means by which they can “stand” Canada. The fragile glee of John’s voice is preceded by the moment when “our laughter explodes. Out of the white mist comes shapes which pause to look, to understand, to wonder why this loud tropical laughter and equatorial joy must take place in this deadening cold” (29). Tim and John’s shared laughter recalls Fanon’s dream that he “burst[s] out laughing,” and their laughter is an expression of their presence and a means of surviving amongst this “white mist” of Canada.

This repetition with difference is evident in the novel’s final depiction of movement where Tim describes the two men “Like two fishing boats without sails, rudderless in the broiling white foam of the waves. We walk with our arms around each other, affection and guidance, ballast we always found in our lives; two old black men coming through a storm in a place we do not really know” (231). Although the themes of involuntary movement, the circular structure of the narrative and the structures of “broiling” whiteness continue, there is some difference that is marked by their male camaraderie. Against the “white foam of the waves” and the “white darkness,” they affectionately “walk with our arms around each other” and are “two old black men coming through a storm in a place we do not really know.” While the promise of masculine
reinvention through movement continues to ring hollow and the men continue to be “Like two fishing boats without sails,” their male camaraderie and their acts of storytelling inflect these repeated acts of movement and dislocation with a new sense of hope. Further, their acts of narration rewrite Canada by inscribing the acts of movement and the chronotopes of the diaspora within the nation. The immobility of white snow, the pervasiveness of white mist, and the paralysis of the white blizzard are rewritten as the “broiling whiteness of the waves” and this subtle rewriting of whiteness via a chronotope of the black diaspora transforms whiteness from signifying national belonging to being yet another identity that is en-route, mobile and emerging. Clarke thus blackens Canada by rewriting the nation not as a destination for some and a detour for others but by making the transnational circuit “home.” The inscription of diasporic movement within Canada rewrites the nation from the perspective of the black diaspora. As such, the novel’s structures of repetition are transformed into a re-routing and detouring of Canada as not the site of arrival or origins but as a site of movement and transition within broader diasporic patterns.

Clarke also revisits what is perhaps Fanon’s “primal scene” (Bhabha, *Location of Culture* 109) of colonial petrifaction in which Fanon describes an encounter on a train with a white child who shouts, "Look, a Negro" (*Black Skin* 109)! Fanon writes,

> Sealed into that crushing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others. Their attention was a liberation, running over my body suddenly abraded into nonbeing, endowing me once more with an agility that I thought lost, and by taking me out of the world, restoring me to it. But just as I reached the other side, I stumbled, and the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. (109)
In this famous colonial encounter, the white child's gaze immures Fanon in the fact of his blackness. In what is perhaps a rearticulation of Lacan's mirror stage (thus the “primal scene”) of the development of the subject, Fanon employs the language of agility and movement to describe being consigned to objecthood. There are a series of contradictory observations in this passage: his body is at once “abraded,” worn away and dissolved into non-being yet also endowed “with an agility I thought lost.” These series of contradictions express a “movement [that] seems strangely immobile” and they are also evident in Fanon’s description of the white, colonial gaze that at once takes Fanon out of the world and restores him to it. I propose that this series of contradictions expresses the process of having one’s subjectivity “Sealed into that crushing objecthood,” the process of losing one’s body for oneself and of having one’s body and one’s subjectivity remade as a composition of others. The contradictions in this passage evoke modernity’s mutually reinforcing civilizing and racist project. This passage in Fanon’s work is often read for its depiction of the body, for its psychoanalytic content, for the experience of racialization and also for the manner in which the gaze reduces colonial subjects to objecthood. Yet implicit in this scene are the chronotopes of modernity and the black diaspora because the staging of Fanon’s intense paralysis when “the other fixed me there” occurs on a train. Both in his language of constrained agility and the setting of the train, Fanon inscribes this suspect form of movement at the core of this encounter.

Gilroy is also attentive to the importance of the train as a chronotope of black modernity, black masculinity and the contradictions of movement that it evokes. He has analyzed the importance of the train (focusing particularly on the figure of the Pullman porter) to Du Bois and James Weldon Johnson. In the opening chapter of *Darker Than Blue*, “Get Free or Die
Gilroy describes the importance of the railway car to African-American critiques of modernity, arguing that W.E.B. Du Bois … was a theorist and interpreter of African American experience for whom the compromised public space of the Jim Crow railroad car provided a central topos. In that absurd location, official, legal segregation touched and debased the worthy lives of black America’s mobile, modernising caste. Seated there, the sublation of their freshly doubled consciousness was something they could begin to imagine. (12; italics in original)

Reading Fanon via Du Bois and Gilroy foregrounds the importance of the train as just such an “absurd” and contradictory site of mobility and immobility, agency and racism. The automobile serves as a metaphor of mobility for a postcolonial generation of black men, but the train is an important image of mobility for Clarke’s and Fanon’s generation of colonial men and women. Gilroy reads the chronotope of the train as primarily a sign of black modernity and double-consciousness, stressing the train’s importance in the routes and transformations of the black diaspora; Fanon, on the contrary, writes the chronotope of the train as the scene of confrontation between white colonizer and black colonial subject. Additionally, my interpretation suggests that both white and black identities are given meaning through these structures of mobility and immobility. Fanon’s chronotope of the train reveals the contradictions of modernity’s civilizing project and also shows how the psychic mobility of the white subject is an effect of the psychic immobilizing of the black subject. The child that shouts “Mama see the Negro! I’m scared” (112) and the liberal white passenger who insists “color prejudice is something I find utterly foreign” (113) both attain and secure their white identity by insisting on the immutable and immobilizing

38 A play on the title of rapper 50-Cent’s breakthrough album, Get Rich or Die Tryin’.
“Fact of” Fanon’s blackness. As such, I argue that the setting of this scene on a train reveals the paradox for Fanon that while he is physically mobile, any form of psychic and social mobility remains out of reach. Furthermore, the psychic and social mobility afforded the white passengers is, in Fanon’s work, an effect of his immobility. I argue that the series of contradictory impulses in this passage can be read as an expression of the simultaneously enabling and disabling aspects of black, colonial subjectivity that emerge against the backdrop of the train, a symbol of the promises of mobility and modernity.

Fanon’s depiction of the colonial gaze on a train, complete with the ambivalence of promised movement and social paralysis, is creatively reinterpreted by Clarke in *The Polished Hoe*. In this text, it is the main character, Mary-Mathilda, who describes a trip she takes by train across America with the plantation manager Mr. Bellfeels. Mary Mathilda’s pleasure in moving across the continent is undercut by her realization aboard the train that “in all this time, travelling by now hundreds and hundreds o’ miles, Mr. Bellfeels is seated in a different section of the train, invisible to me, and separated from me. Mr. Bellfeels is sitting in one section, a reserved compartment of the train, a sleeper. And I in a next section they called third-class, sitting up, my back hurting me, all throughout this journey north ... I was *serrigated* from Mr. Bellfeels” (188; italics in original). Clarke combines Fanon's attention to the gaze with the latter's elaboration of the Manichean organization of colonial space to undercut the pleasures and promises of mobility. These are the new post-plantation, but not post Jim Crow, configurations of race relations. Ironically, it is the great house of the plantation in *The Polished Hoe* that allows for some degree of mobility and mingling of the fixed positions of black and white such that Bellfeels and Mary-Mathilda could have a relationship (albeit a very violent and coercive one). The space of the train, however, is so strictly racially demarcated that Bellfeels and Mary-
Mathilda are “invisible” to one another. Like the white people in Fanon’s text, Bellfeels’s whiteness depends on Mary-Mathilda’s segregation and both Fanon and Clarke depict the mobility of the train as a paradoxical site wherein the social mobility of whiteness depends on the psychic and social immobility of black people. Like Fanon, Mary Mathilda gives an account of how, despite her physical movement, “the other fixed me there” (109). Yet Clarke’s rewriting of Fanon’s chronotope of the train also imagines that movement as a metaphor for the possibility of destabilizing racial identities. The contradictions of whiteness as a privileged racial identity that defines itself against a “Fact” of immutable blackness are demonstrated by both Fanon and Clarke. If Fanon is the mirror onto which the white passengers gaze, then neither Fanon’s blackness nor the privileged whiteness is a fact; both are mutually constitutive and imaginary.

The shift from Fanon's world to Clarke's is evident in the invisible and implicit scene of racial management and exclusion that Mary Mathilda describes. If the encounter between Fanon and the white child precipitates the emergence of the "fact of blackness," that Manichean moment already contains and conditions the present and inconceivable future that Mary Mathilda represents. In *The Polished Hoe* the racism on the train is not staged as a confrontation with a paralysing and objectifying white gaze but is transformed into a structure of enforced immobility that is present in the very spatial arrangement of the train. Indeed, the scene of confrontation which petrifies Fanon is impossible in this segregated train, suggesting that while the social order has shifted, the enforced immobilities of race continue to persist even while they have been rendered “invisible.” Rather than an explicit confrontation with a white gaze, the immobility of racism makes itself felt through the segregation of the train as well as in the names of towns such as “Lynchburg” (194; italics in original) that the train passes through. Furthermore, whereas the racism in Fanon is an explicit racist confrontation between a black man and a white gaze, here
Clarke rewrites the scene from the perspective of a black woman who is not explicitly confronted by a racist yet must simply endure these new structures of apartheid. Mary-Mathilda’s use of the word “invisible” recalls the depiction of the “invisible policemen” in “Sometimes, A Motherless Child” to indicate how the structures of racism and colonial immobility persist in new invisible and structural forms. In contrast to Fanon who is confronted outright with a racist statement on the train, Mary Mathilda is subjected to “invisible” yet equally pernicious forms of racial segregation and management. I argue that Clarke’s shift from racist confrontation to structural forms of racism is one way by which he transforms Fanon’s chronotopes of mobility and immobility to indicate how the colonial systems of control and racial management persist in the post-colonial world in new, often invisible forms.

These invisible forms of racism, psychic immobility and apartheid take on new dimensions in Clarke’s depiction of black life in Canada. In More Clarke returns to Fanon’s primal scene on the train, yet here he writes this chronotope within Canada, showing the invisible structures of psychic immobility on the subway, bus and other forms of public transit. Like Mary-Mathilda, Idora recalls a trip to America that she took with her friend Josephine. The narrator explains that “Josephine is soon sound asleep. ... And Idora is left alone to press her face against the cold window, to admire the Gardiner Expressway, which turns into the 401 West, and she sees the roof of a building and then more of the building, and recognizes where she is now” (127). While Josephine sleeps easily, Idora recognizes the building as the “place she went for an appointment once about a rent-controlled government apartment. It all comes back to her” (127). She recalls being told by the supervisor that “she will have to be put on the city’s List of Unfortunate Indigent Single Women” (128) and that she is a “member of a visible minority and in this office we know that you are exposed to rape and sexual abuse . . . our statistics verify that
profile of women like you . . . there’s cases on file of physical abuse that you suffer, and this happens when the surrogate father, or the boyfriend, turns up, if you know what I mean’’ (128; ellipses in original). Idora finds the state-imposed definition of “visible minority” paralyzing, turning her into a statistic, and conspiring to label her “women like you.” Josephine’s easy sleep on the bus parallels the ease with which Bellfeels travels across America and Idora’s experience of being trapped within stereotypes recalls Mary-Mathilda’s corporeal and psychic immobility. The narrator describes Idora lying in her apartment as she recalls the bus trip she took with Josephine to America. On the bus Idora recalls her exchange with the city clerk who marks her as a “visible minority.” In this passage Clarke once again reveals the continuities between the psychic immobilities of the colony, the segregated American south and contemporary multicultural Canada.

Idora describes this structural racism as an integral part of “her personal history of Canada. Her invisible visibility made her seethe with anger and rage for the police and for white people, but it also made her feel guilty, inferior, sorry to be so visible” (109). Katherine McKittrick has made the connection between what Idora describes as “Her invisible visibility,” structural racism in Canada and the abjection of black people from the nation. McKittrick argues that “black Canada is lived as unvisibility” (Demonic Grounds96); “black Canada is simultaneously invisible and visibly non-Canadian. This contradiction demonstrates the subtle ways in which domination shapes what has been called ‘the absented presence’ of black Canada and black Canadian geographies: black people in Canada are geographically un-Canadian” (99). McKittrick’s analysis of the way in which “black Canada is simultaneously invisible and visibly non-Canadian” updates the contradictions of Fanon’s experience on the train and provides a new gloss on the invisible and endemic structures of Canadian racism. Idora addresses her own
unvisibility when, riding the subway, she imagines herself as “lost and without roots, without anchor; too embarrassed to admit that she is lost; too ashamed to ask for assistance. How can she confess that she is lost? A big woman like her? ... Ask for directions? And expose herself as an immigrant, a visible minority, a Jamaican, even though she is not from Jamaica” (155)? Idora’s stated anxiety of being ‘exposed’ as a visible minority indicates her capacity to make visible the invisible structures of race in Canada: recognizing the structures of visibility that mark her as un-Canadian. The fear of being lost, of being unanchored in her origins, is coupled with Idora’s fear of being labelled and treated as a “visible minority” within Canada. Continuing to recall her trip on the Toronto subway line, Idora thinks “I am getting a little anxious, and start to feel lost, and feel I am alone in the entire subway train; alone in Toronto on this cold morning, like how I would sometimes find myself alone in the wide sea; ... My anxiety is growing” (155). Idora’s reimagining of the subway train as akin to the “wide sea” links the chronotope of the train to that of the ocean and the history of the Middle Passage. The narrator describes how “She is the only black person in this coach of the subway. ‘This feeling of being in the minority . . . of inferiority . . . not that I am inferior . . . this feeling of segregation runs through my mind, each time I travel on public transportation” (69; ellipses in original).

In addition to these explicit references to movement, in both More and The Polished Hoe Clarke is attentive to the manner in which this invisible visibility is produced through a spatial encoding of race. Clarke’s expression of psychic immobility and unvisibility is evident throughout his depiction of the various spaces of home, the bar, the church, and the city. Clarke at once depicts how black people’s immobility is produced through the arrangement of these spaces and how this immobility is resisted by reimagining space through diasporic chronotopes. Clarke’s depiction of the spaces of ‘home’ for instance reveal how black people are never entirely secure
or at home in Canada. Home is never a stable or secure space of belonging or retreat but rather is structured by discourses of race, power, and gender. Tim and John in The Origin of Waves describe their respective houses but they never go there, spending the narrative in a bar or on a street. John exclaims “Home! What a sweet word! We’ve made this goddamn bar our home, I’d say! And what a sweet home! Home-sweet-home, home-sweet-home” (143). John’s repetition suggests that the bar is not the “Home-sweet-home” that he insists it is and reveals his worry that they continue to be seen as outsiders in the bar and in Canada. Tim confirms this suspicion later in the text when he notices, “Around us is the whispering of church and concert congregation. At times like this, after all these years, it is the quietness of this city that makes me feel different, that makes me shiver with that difference” (167). The quietness of the bar and the city is disrupted by their laughter, conversation and their very presence. It is telling that John identifies the bar as ‘home’ and this is typical of Clarke’s depiction of black men who are often depicted in the street, at bars, in restaurants but very rarely within a domestic space. Indeed, within Clarke’s narratives it is primarily his female characters who are depicted within the space of the home while he locates his male characters in streets, bars, schools, offices, automobiles, and trains. In each of the texts that BJ appears in, for instance, he is constantly fleeing home and trying to get away from the domestic space. Similarly, the unnamed male protagonist in “Canadian Experience” resents staying home during the week and sees it as a sign of his failing as a man. Throughout Clarke’s narratives, domestic space is a decidedly female space and despite the unhomeliness of home in Canada, the home remains the privileged domain of women. In this respect, Clarke’s inscription of black diasporic mobility takes on patriarchal dimensions as Clarke paradoxically represents black people’s unhomeliness within the nation alongside black women’s homeliness within the home, thus further immobilizing his female characters. Carol Boyce Davies argues “that once
Black women are accounted for, both ‘travelling’ and ‘theory’ can also be identified as Black women’s prerogatives” (44) and she calls on critics to conceive of “Black female subjectivity … not primarily in terms of domination, subordination or ‘subalternization,’ but in terms of slipperiness, elsewhereness” (36). I argue that despite locating women within the home, Clarke’s texts do conceive of travelling and mobility as black women’s prerogatives and not strictly (as Gilroy is criticized for) as the domain of men. As in his rewriting of Fanon, he repeatedly writes the chronotopes of the black diaspora from the perspective of his female characters. While he does write the space of the home as a decidedly female space in a way that consigns his female characters to domestic and rooted lives, Clarke also, perhaps paradoxically, indicates how the home is an uncomfortable, confining and immobilizing space.

Both More and The Polished Hoe describe decidedly female domestic and circumscribed spaces. The entire narrative of The Polished Hoe is told in different parts of the plantation house and each aspect of Mary-Mathilda’s statement is linked to a different space of the plantation. Even when Mary-Mathilda recalls her travel, she recalls it from the space of the plantation house. Percy is intimidated by the plantation, needing Mary Mathilda to serve as his guide, even though her position is that of criminal and servant, and she is in the throes of confessing her murder of Bellfeels. In a curious way, she is more at home here than he is. Mary-Mathilda was born in the north field of the plantation, amongst the sugar cane and, after being raised by her mother on the outskirts of the plantation, eventually moves into the plantation home after she is raped by Bellfeels. Mary-Mathilda makes the link between slavery, race and the plantation when she explains, “this Plantation touch all of we. All our lives was branded by this Plantation” (18). Mary-Mathilda’s statement gives a history not just of slavery but of what the specific panoptic space of the plantation signifies: “The Main House have three floors, to look over the entire estate
of the Plantation, like a tower in a castle. To spy on everybody ... the lay of the land of things; the division of work and of household” (4). Towards the end of the novel Mary-Mathilda describes a collective experience of imprisonment that binds black people together, “no matter which Plantation we are to call home-prison, as Ma always referred to her life on this Plantation, as” (367; italics in original). The language of home-prison reveals how Clarke at once locates his female characters within the space of the home yet is also attentive to the disabling, immobilizing and unhomely aspects of any home for those characters. Indeed, the plantation was once an actual prison as Mary-Mathilda reveals to Percy when they move from the main floor to her bedroom and then into the dungeons beneath the kitchen. Moving through the dungeons she tells the story of three men who, after being freed, demanded higher wages and were locked up in the dungeon and severely beaten and whipped. The spatial configuration of the dungeons beneath the kitchen mirrors the repressed history of the plantation. Mary-Mathilda explains that the night the men were whipped, “the Plantation was having a birthday party ... they could hear the cowskin, the bull-pistle whip ... tearing-into flesh, plax! plax! plax!/in a rhythm as if the man wielding the balata was looking at the hand of a metronome, or a clock, measuring-off time in seconds” (340; italics in original). The history of slavery and colonialism has not passed but is recorded in the bodies of the men in the dungeon and in the spatial arrangement of the plantation house itself. Mary-Mathilda’s recollection of the rhythm and time of the balata and whip is akin to Brand’s “history’s pulse / measured with another hand” yet here it is the markings of space and memory that remember history from a black diasporic perspective. Mary-Mathilda’s recollection of the whipping and her graphic depiction of the “tearing-into flesh” indicates how the history of violence against the black body is not buried in the dungeons but is alive and well in her recollections. The location of the dungeons beneath the kitchen reveals the spatial encoding of
race and power in the great house. While the dungeons are underground, their presence cannot be isolated from the above-ground space of the plantation. In a somewhat paradoxical sense, Mary-Mathilda’s narrating of this incident of violence, captivity and immobility becomes a means of revealing the history of the space of the plantation, the unhomeliness of home and the manner in which space produces the violence against and immobility of the body.

Despite the apparent differences between plantation and urban apartment, both spaces are imprisoning. Unlike the plantation house which is at the centre of the village, and Mary’s bedroom which looks out over the entire village, Idora’s apartment has a partial and obscured view of the street. The narrator of *The Polished Hoe* describes Percy’s amazement when he looks through Mary’s window which has a panoptic view of the village below: “He walks this Village at the level of the centipede and the worm, on bare ground, on roads in the darkest of nights, patrolling. Now, from this window, he has a new elevated knowledge of his Village” (304). There is a sense of agency and power in having access to this “elevated knowledge” and in being able to survey the land. This visual power associated with Mary’s window and the overseer’s gaze contrasts with the subterranean window wells of Idora’s basement apartment. Idora lives beneath even “the level of the centipede and the worm” and the narrator observes,

> Her apartment has two windows on the south side, facing the Park. They look like portholes to her; ... looking through them to see the people passing, they make her feel she is on a schooner, watching the waves, and the fish beside the boat swimming faster, passing her in their silent, surer confidence. So, when she looks through the two rectangular windows, it is as if she is in a submarine; and it is the people, men and women and children, in prams and strollers, who pass her, in front of her subterranean window-hatches. They are moving, and she is standing still. She is not tall enough to see
the entire bodies of the people passing, at all hours of the day and night, in all months of the year, in all temperatures. She never sees their full stature. She has to stand on her bed to see three-quarters of a person’s body. (44)

Living underground, Idora’s inability to see the entirety of her street, her neighbours and her city, links her spatial position in the city to her experience of immobility and unvisibility. She imagines herself as completely cut off from the above-ground world of movement and life. Indeed, her subterranean perspective is connected to her physical and figurative immobility as it is the passersby that “are moving, and she is standing still.”

David Theo Goldberg asserts, “Racism becomes institutionally normalized in and through spatial configuration, just as social space is made to seem natural, a given, by being conceived and defined in racial terms” (185). Idora’s “subterranean” position in a basement apartment, cut off from the city that passes by, can be read as a spatial analogue of her marginalization and experience of social immobility in Canada. Goldberg describes this link between racial and spatial configurations as a kind of “periphrastic space … It does not require the absolute displacement of persons to or outside city limits, to the literal margins of urban space. It merely entails their circumscription in terms of location and their limitation in terms of access – to power” (188; italics in original). Idora has not been pushed outside the city but rather relegated to just such a “periphrastic space” whereby her presence goes unnoticed in Toronto. Her position in the city is analogous to the dungeons in the plantation house of The Polished Hoe yet Idora’s spatial marginalization is an effect of class and implicit racial-spatial arrangements rather than explicit colonialism or slavery. As Fanon explains, “apartheid is but one method of compartmentalizing the colonial world” (Wretched 15). Idora is not subject to apartheid but is relegated to a periphrastic space through economic and invisible racial structures with the effect
that she is rendered univisible in Canada. This passage, with the fish and ocean imagery, recalls Toni Morrison’s argument in Playing in the Dark (1992) that “It is as if I had been looking at a fishbowl … and suddenly I saw the bowl, the structure that transparently (and invisibly) permits the ordered life it contains to exist in the larger world” (17). Morrison’s gaze shifts from seeing the fish moving to seeing the fishbowl that constrains and regulates their movement. Like Morrison, Idora’s partial perspective makes her aware of the fishbowl that she herself is in and the way in which race in Canada functions “transparently (and invisibly).” In this sense, Idora’s diasporic and marginalized perspective offers a unique, critical view of society.39

Clarke’s depiction of the periphractic space and endemic immobility of black life in Canada reveals the continuities between the spaces of the plantation, colony, and the nation. His characters may cross national borders and continents but they remain trapped within an immobilizing Fact of Blackness. Fanon’s argument that the colonial subject’s psychic immobility is “a direct result of colonialist subjugation” is transposed in Clarke’s work to reveal how Idora’s, Tim’s, BJ’s and his other Canadian characters’ psychic immobility is a direct result of the social order in Canada. In McKittrick’s terms, Clarke’s texts “hold place and placelessness in tension, through imagination and materiality, and therefore re-spatialize Canada on what might be considered unfamiliar terms” (Demonic Grounds 106).

Reading Clarke via Fanon reveals how Clarke’s texts correct some of Fanon’s blind spots. Khachig Tölölyan has critiqued the manner in which theorizations of diasporic life lack a certain “richness,” particularly the manner in which diasporic identity becomes too often “an occasion for celebration of multiplicity and mobility” (28) without consideration of the manner in

39 Depictions of the diasporic perspective as at once partial and also revealing in its partiality pervade diasporic Caribbean writing. Perhaps the most famous instance occurs in Sam Selvon’s The Lonely Londoners (1956) where one character views London nightlife through a kitchen window while she washes dishes.
which that mobility is a “fundamental injunction” rather than an actual choice. I argue that Clarke’s texts add to the richness of theories of the black diaspora and undercut this celebration of mobility by indicating the persistence of the immobility of race in Canada and also insist on the importance of narrative to complicating and ensuring the “richness” of theorizations of black diasporic double-consciousness in Canada. Fanon is often critiqued for his too-easy invoking of ‘the people’ or ‘the masses’ as a stable assembly of uniform subjects. Neil Lazarus has suggested that Fanon’s work involves a “certain unwarranted ‘speaking for’ – that is, ventriloquizing, speaking ‘in the place of’ or ‘instead of’” (179). Whereas Fanon’s work is often described as lacking “a critical and dialectical analysis of the process of the formation of consciousness” (Clegg 239) or as engaged in a “ventrioloquizing” of the black colonial subject, Clarke’s dynamic style gives his world both depth and vitality. His command of diction, idiom, and accent makes his characters leap off the page. Their anguish is visceral, their anger explosive, and their laughter loud. Clarke’s depiction of double-consciousness differs from that of Gilroy who imagines the black subject negotiating and engaging in a syncretic blending of national and diasporic perspectives. Clarke’s narratives also disavow Fanon’s fantasy of violent rupture and complete liberation of the black subject from forms of social and psychic immobility. Clarke’s narratives show how the fantasy of violent rupture is untenable and how the psychic immobility of the colony and the plantation persist despite the promises of independence, multiculturalism and citizenship. Clarke’s narratives thus employ the chronotopes of the diaspora to depict diasporic double-consciousness in Canada and thus transform the conditions in which nation and citizen are imagined.

It is in Clarke’s most recent text, *More*, that he most discernibly employs the chronotopes of the black diaspora in order to blacken Canada. Certainly Idora’s basement apartment is a
marginalized and periphractic space, yet her depiction of that space through the chronotopes of the black diaspora reconceives of her basement as less immobilizing and confining. Comparing her basement windows to “portholes” and her basement apartment to “a schooner,” Idora reimagines the periphractic space of the basement as far more mobile, thus gesturing towards Clarke’s project of writing Canada as a less immobilizing space for his characters. Later in the novel the narrator describes Idora lying “in the belly of a fish. And her basement is the fish, and she is engulfed and enveloped in its darkness and its hollowness” (241). The sea, sailing and fish imagery that the narrator uses to describe Idora’s apartment recall Idora’s migration from the Caribbean to Canada and her own use of nautical chronotopes to comprehend and retell the events of her life in Canada. Additionally, the narrator’s description of Idora lying “in the belly of a fish” is an allusion to the Biblical narrative of Jonah and the whale. The Jonah narrative parallels Idora's in their shared themes of suspect mobility, exile, and social critique and the chronotope of Jonah in the belly of the whale is the central metaphor of corporeal mobility and psychic immobility in the latter portion of More. Idora emerges, after three days in her basement, to deliver a sermon, at the “Apostolicals” church, on Jonah and his experience in the belly of the whale. Idora recalls that “the one story in the Bible which touched her admiration best . . . if not worst . . . was the story of Jonah in the Belly of the Whale” (191). The Jonah narrative both frightens and appeals to her as it offers such an apt depiction of her own mixture of adventurousness and self-inflicted paralysis. In addition to the connections between Idora’s migration from the Caribbean and Jonah’s exile from the ship, the narrative of Jonah in the belly of the whale evokes the mixed relationship to movement that pervades Clarke’s corpus. Jonah’s imprisoned movement in the whale provides perhaps the most evocative chronotope for Idora’s life in Toronto, expressing both her compulsion to move and the structures of psychic and social
immobility that bind her. In the same sense that Jonah is imprisoned within the whale yet also moving with the whale as it swims, each of Clarke’s characters is engaged in a similarly mixed form of psychic stasis and corporeal movement. Indeed, Tim in *The Origin of Waves* describes the night he spent with the only woman he loved as being “like Jonah in the belly of the whale. The seas parted, like the seas that rise-up and tumbled-over the bow of *Galilee* that tossed my uncle overboard. Those seas of that night’s story were filled with sharks that kill, the seas that washed-him-in, big, bloated, and bulgeous . . .” (82). Tim invokes the Jonah narrative to give legitimacy to the feelings of danger, anxiety, pleasure and excitement that he felt that night. For Idora, the story of Jonah not only refers to her anxiety towards her own immigration and transnational movement but also her relationship to the Canadian state. The figurative whale that Idora is trapped within is not just her basement apartment but also Canada itself. The feelings of immobility and unvisibility produced by the Canadian state, in the marking and management of “visible minorities” and the persistence of racism, construct Canada as a kind of whale in which Idora is trapped. Just as Jonah preaches to the city of Nineveh and calls on its residents to repent, Idora preaches to her own community and her city of Toronto, thus transforming these places through her language. Like Jonah, Idora feels that her exile and her social marginalization have given her insight into the workings of Canadian society. Similarly, Idora sees, in Jonah’s desire to defy God’s command and escape Nineveh, a parallel narrative to her own flight to Canada and to the general condition of black diasporic life.

It is the Jonah narrative that leads Idora to leave the immobility of her basement apartment. After spending three days in her basement apartment remembering and retelling the narrative of her immigration to Canada and her life in Canada, she leaves her apartment on the
third day, a Sunday, to preach the story of Jonah to her congregation. She tells the congregation that,

out of the fish’s belly, Jonah was crying out to God, ‘I am the reason for my own anguish. . . amen! . . . ‘Jeeees-sus’ Idora screams. ‘I’m running for my life!’ ‘We’re all running for our lives, Sister!’ ‘Ole Jonah cried out . . . amen! . . . out of the fish’s belly . . . amen! . . . and said . . . amen! . . . ‘The Lord hath given unto me, another chance! I am going to pray! And maybe’ . . . amen! . . . ‘maybe, the Lord will hear my prayer . . . ’ The church is shaking. Everybody is standing and clapping ... Idora begins to lead the congregation in the altar call, in song. She begins with the song she has been singing in her basement apartment ... ‘I’m Running for My Life.’ (272-3; ellipses in original)

This section of the text is remarkably different from the rest of the novel as the multiple voices, disrupted speeches and interjections in this section mark this passage as dynamic. The energy of this passage is in stark contrast to Idora’s previously stated desire to “lie low, and to remain ‘dead’” (191), a desire that is evinced in immobility and in the languorous temporality of the narrative up to this point. The heteroglossia of the narrative, Idora’s preaching and the numerous voices and shouts of the congregation infuse this passage with an energy that has been otherwise absent. The narrative focus expands to include the diverse and unnamed voices in the congregation. The bulk of the novel alternates between direct and indirect focalization, whereas here the narrator records only Idora’s voice along with the voices of the other parishioners. In this passage the narrator offers no access to Idora’s thoughts but instead records her sermon and the voices and energy of the other parishioners. This shift in form is signified by the use of ellipses throughout this section which indicate moments of disruption and of the narrative voice outpaced by the voices in the church thus giving the narrative a palpable sense of vibrancy and energy.
Michael Bucknor has argued that Clarke’s use of “ellipses … expose the gaps within the text not as failed representations but as translations. Thus, a lack of success in attaining full equivalence, total containment, and faithful rendition of experience in language is laid bare in empty spaces” (152). Bucknor argues against those critics that read Clarke’s work as realist, sociological accounts of black Canadian life and instead demonstrates the manner in which Clarke thematizes the struggle to represent in the form of his prose. The immobility evident in the earlier sections of the novel breaks apart here to express a formal openness that parallels Idora’s newfound psychic mobility. The omniscient narrator in the earlier sections of the novel offered complete access to Idora’s thoughts, while the ellipses in this section mark the oral, corporeal and imaginative energy and vibrancy that the narrator cannot wholly convey.40

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40Clarke’s use of the Jonah narrative locates this collective struggle to keep “Running for My Life” within the Canadian narration of nation. Northrop Frye has famously observed that “Canada has, for all practical purposes, no Atlantic seaboard. The traveller from Europe edges into it like a tiny Jonah entering an inconceivably large whale, slipping past the Straits of Belle Isle into the Gulf of St. Lawrence... To enter the United States is the matter of crossing an ocean; to enter Canada is a matter of being silently swallowed by an alien continent” (217). Jonathan Kertzer explains Frye’s articulation as a statement that “Canadians often feel [that] ... They must all become Jonahs ... who give themselves to the Canadian leviathan” (5). This image of the all-consuming Canadian leviathan is raised again and again throughout Canadian criticism and has led to the oft-cited and oft-critiqued themes of Survival and the Garrison Mentality that defined much thematic criticism. Kertzer transforms the Jonah narrative to contend with the concerns of immigrant writers in Canada, arguing that “To the ethnic, feminist, Native writers, the bourgeois nation is a monster, an ideological aberration to be corrected, rather than a natural habitation” (133). Clarke’s use of the Jonah narrative functions in yet another manner, focusing on the ambivalent sense of movement that structures Jonah’s narrative, the links between Jonah’s involuntary and constricted movement and the ambivalence towards movement expressed by the diasporic subjects in his texts. In this sense, Clarke’s use of the Jonah narrative creatively rewrites this tradition of Canadian Jonahs such that he makes the narrative relevant to the lives of Idora and the other diasporic figures in his narratives.

Clarke’s repeated use of the Jonah narrative in his writing marks a point of connection between the imaginative vocabularies of Canada and the black diaspora, thus locating black diasporic themes and motifs within Canada rather than as decidedly external to Canada. The paralyzing anxiety expressed by Frye’s European traveller is rewritten as the doubly-inflected form of movement of the diaspora. Where Frye, Kertzer and others use the Jonah narrative to describe how one becomes Canadian, Clarke employs Jonah as chronotope in order to reveal how Canada becomes diasporic by transforming the stability of place into one more route in the diaspora. The longing for rooting is transformed into the practices of routing in Clarke’s work in such a way that black abjection is transformed into a rewriting and blackening of the nation itself. Like Brand’s blackening of the Canadian long poem, Clarke’s rewriting of the Jonah narrative not only provides an appropriate form for articulating black diasporic experience in Canada but also shows
The novel concludes with Idora running for her life, taking the congregation to which she preaches, with her. Both Alan, in Brand's thirsty, and Idora are mad prophets, and it is unclear, despite the rousing tone and communal intent of Idora's jeremiad, and because she is the only one who both speaks and sees in the novel, whether the salvation in question is hers alone. Alan's "ravings" get him killed, even if they bear the truth of suffering. Clarke and Brand share the desire to make their lowly characters exemplary figures and to grant both meaning and value to their banal, imprisoning lives. Brand and Clarke are the voices of their communities, not in the sense that they speak for those whose lives remain unremarked, but in the power with which they imagine the rich, inner lives of their characters in acts of extraordinary empathy. This empathy is a consequence of their supple command of words and their respect for silences. Their literary repertoire exploits voice, accent, idiom, diction, register, and genre to communicate their characters' distinct perspectives on common predicaments. After reading their work, it is no longer possible simply to observe with distant sympathy the lives they describe; instead, one lives their joy and agony, but with an unsentimental understanding of the consequences of The Middle Passage and of the ethos of migration.

how the concerns of his black diasporic characters are decidedly Canadian ones. Like Brand, Clarke exploits the openness of Canadian motifs and forms to reimagine the Jonah narrative as giving voice to black diasporic experience within Canada. Clarke’s crossing of the forms of Canadian writing with those of the black diaspora resists any strict demarcation between black and Canada and instead insists on crossing as an appropriate form for thinking of black presences in Canada. Blackness, in Clarke’s work, is not external to Canada, here only temporarily, and reflecting negatively against the “white darkness” of Canada. Rather, Clarke’s use of Jonah, his inscription of psychic immobility in Canada, and his identification of the continuities of the spaces of the plantation, the colony and the multicultural nation, write black diasporic concerns as central to the Canadian imaginary. If More’s opening image of the paralyzed, frozen and barren black trees expresses the impossibility of rooting, the vibrancy of Idora’s sermon and her rewriting of the Jonah narrative gestures towards the possibilities implicit in rooting the nation. In this sense, the Jonah narrative, more than any of Clarke’s other chronotopes, inserts a detour into the narration of Canada. Clarke’s detours disavow the logic of origins or belonging and rewrite Canadian space via the chronotopes of the black diaspora.
Chapter 4: Writing Life-Worlds: Canadian History and the Representation of Albert Johnson

Now the revisionists went to work, the great legitimizing machinery of liberal democracy set about inserting itself as always in favour of racial equality … The newspapers said immigrants were taking away white people’s jobs, the newspapers said black youth were running amok, the newspapers said before black people came here there was no racism, the newspaper said before black youth there was no crime, the newspapers said we live in a multicultural society

-Dionne Brand Bread Out of Stone 103

At the opposite pole [of the body of the King] one might imagine placing the body of the condemned man; he, too, has legal status; he gives rise to his own ceremonial and he calls forth a whole theoretical discourse, not in order to ground the “surplus power” possessed by the person of the sovereign, but in order to code the “lack of power” with which those subjected to punishment are marked. In the darkest region of the political field, the condemned man represents the symmetrical, inverted figure of the king.

-Michel Foucault Discipline and Punish 29

As the epigraph from Dionne Brand indicates, any analysis of black diasporic writing in Canada would be severely lacking if it focused strictly on literary representations. The projects of blackening that I have described are both literary and public struggles to inscribe blackness in Canada and to work against the smearing, misrepresentation and erasure of black presences in Canada. As such, these textual acts of blackening must be situated within their political contexts and must be read as part of the blackening of the Canadian public sphere. Indeed, any analysis of
Brand’s and Clarke’s blackening that focused strictly on their literary work would miss the manner in which those works respond to and are inflected by public debates over the relationships among race, citizenship and nation. This chapter links the previous two chapters’ analyses of Brand’s and Clarke’s literary blackening with a reading of the devaluing of blackness in the public realm. In Stuart Hall’s terms, this chapter aims to bring together the “semiotic and discursive” aspects of blackening that intervene in the Canadian public sphere. Hall writes that “the semiotic approach is concerned with the how of representation, with how language produces meaning - what has been called its ‘poetics’; whereas the discursive approach is more concerned with the effects and consequences of representation – its ‘politics’” (Hall, Representations 6; italics in original). For the authors in this study, the semiotic and discursive, the poetic and the political, overlap. I also show how public discourse and conceptions of Canadian citizenship are mediated by an invisible whiteness. This chapter reads the politics and poetics of blackening and of white Canadian civility (Coleman 2006) through the depiction of the life of Albert Johnson and the events leading to his death in 1979. Johnson’s death serves as a flashpoint for how pre-multicultural Canada coped with increasingly difficult questions of cultural difference and race and for the manner in which Canadian public discourse continues to neglect black Canadian histories. Johnson’s death, before the passing of the Official Multiculturalism Act, before the controversies of the “Into the Heart of Africa” exhibit and the “Writing Thru Race” conference, represents the discourse of race in Canada before the heady days of multiculturalism. Indeed, Brand insists on the importance of historicizing multicultural Canada in her description of how the historical “revisionists went to work” to erase this history of racism in Canada and assert that Canada was “always in favour of racial equality.” My reading of the mainstream newspaper coverage of Johnson’s death reveals how the public discourse of race in Canada is based on a
structural opposition between a conception of whiteness as civility and blackness as deviance. I then demonstrate how Austin Clarke’s, Dionne Brand’s and Neil Bissoondath’s narratives of Albert Johnson intervene in this public and historical discourse and contribute to a blackening of Canadian history. I read the pre-history of multicultural Canada by analyzing one instance of the buried and marginalized history of racism in Canada. Albert Johnson’s death occurs before the passing of the Official Multiculturalism Act and newspaper accounts of Johnson’s death reveal the manner in which neither “liberal democracy” nor white people in Canada were always “in favour of racial equality.” Moreover, black Canadians are not depicted through the logic of the hyphen but are excluded outright from the Canadian national imaginary.

Benedict Anderson (1983) has famously argued the importance of the print media in imagining a national community; my reading shows the racial exclusions at work in such imaginings. If Stuart Hall is correct in his observation that “the media’s main sphere of operations is the production and transformation of ideologies” then this chapter identifies the manner in which the public sphere in Canada is shaped by particular racial ideologies. While it would be incorrect to draw a stark and definitive division between the space of literary production and interpretation and that of the public sphere, I begin from the position that newspaper representation constitutes an explicitly and intentional public discourse whereas literary representation is perhaps only latently so. This public sphere approximates but is not equivalent to Jürgen Habermas’s description of the eighteenth-century, European public sphere as “a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed” (350). This conception of the public sphere must be modified, however, as both Habermas himself and John

41 Habermas describes the changed nature of the contemporary public sphere and the impossibility of recreating that classic public sphere. He argues that “Although the liberal model of the public sphere is still instructive today ... it cannot be applied to the actual conditions of an industrially advanced mass
Keane argue that “The ideal of a unified public sphere and its corresponding vision of a territorially bounded republic of citizens striving to live up to their definition of the public good are obsolete” (Keane 366). This is not to say that the public sphere no longer exists but rather that it takes new forms as the political economy of the conceptions of the public, private and nation are transformed. I argue in this chapter that the discourse concerning Albert Johnson’s death occurs in the public sphere (albeit, mediated by private interests) and shapes public considerations of race, citizenship, and black and white identity. Hall describes how the media provides public discourse with a “grammar of race” and in Canada this grammar depicts whiteness as civility and blackness as unruliness. If Habermas is right in suggesting that there is an increasing “‘refeudalization’ of the public sphere” whereby “large organizations strive for political compromises with the state and with each other” outside the public realm, then perhaps white Canada constitutes just such an organization that delimits access to that public sphere along racial lines. Perhaps this collective white Canadian identity is what Dionne Brand, in the epigraph to this chapter, identifies as the “we” of public discourse. A great deal relies on the constitution of that invisible “we,” who it includes and how it is formed by excluding others. Brand’s irony illuminates the contradictions of the Canadian public sphere that transforms explicit racism into a more subtle yet equally pernicious language of exclusion and racism. This chapter is concerned with the constitution of that “we” in both its semiotic and discursive forms and the way in which that “we” engages in a devaluing and smearing of blackness.

The “grammar of race” in the Canadian public sphere and mainstream media has been analyzed by Henry and Tator in *Discourses of Domination* (2002). Their work is a pioneering democracy organized in the form of the social welfare state. ... The public sphere ... becomes a field for the competition of interests, competition which assumes the form of violent conflict ... This leads to a kind of ‘refeudalization’ of the public sphere. Large organizations strive for political compromises with the state and with each other, excluding the public sphere whenever possible” (354).
effort to apply the methods of Critical Discourse Analysis to the products of the Canadian English-language mainstream press in order to identify the process of “democratic racism” (38). Their approach ... involves examining ‘codes of meaning’ (Hebdige, 1993) – that is, the unquestioned assumptions, values, norms and practices that are rooted in the dominant culture’s ideology and in the subculture of media organizations. We wish to help uncover and critically examine what passes as ‘everyday commonsense’ (Essed, 1990) – what mainstream culture defines as ‘truth,’ and accepts as ‘fact,’ and views as ‘reality’ (Foucault, 1980). (6)

Henry and Tator take the position that the media are in the business of discursive production and their analysis aims to uncover the mechanics of that discourse as it engages questions of race and cultural difference. Their analysis plainly demonstrates how concepts of “Tolerance, equality and freedom of expression – central concepts in liberal discourse – have immensely flexible meanings’ (38) and how this democratic language can produce racially exclusive practices. They show how a “grammar of race” within Canadian mainstream media marks whiteness as invisible, rational and normal and blackness as deviant, criminal and problematic. Henry and Tator describe this as the “democratic racism” that operates within liberalism and multiculturalism and produces a unique form of racial exclusion. They define “democratic racism” as

42 They describe their methodology as follows: “The following, then, is the definition of discourse that informs our theoretical approach to this study: A discourse is a way of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic or practice: a cluster or formation of ideas, images, and practices that provide ways of talking about forms of knowledge and conduct associated with a particular topic, social activity, or institutional site in society. A discursive formation defines what is and is not appropriate in our formulation of, and our practices in relation to, a particular subject or site of social activity; what knowledge is considered useful, relevant and true in that context; and what sorts of persons or subjects embody its characteristics. Discursive has become the general term used to refer to any approach in which meaning, representation, and culture are considered to be constitutive” (26; italics in original).
an ideology in which two conflicting sets of values are made congruent with each other. Democratic principles such as equality, fairness, and justice conflict with, but also but [sic] coexist with, racist attitudes and behaviours – including negative feelings about minority groups and differential treatment of them ... It is an elusive concept because the rhetoric of dominant discourses is hidden within the mythical norms that define Canada as a white, humanistic, tolerant, and accommodating society. However, as all of the case studies have shown, beneath the reassuring notions of liberal arguments and justificatory lines of reasoning remain deeply problematic ideas about minority populations. (228)

The two “conflicting sets of values” that are “made congruent with each other” are the values of both liberalism and racism. Democratic racism describes how liberalism’s language of equality and individuality cannot identify, and may actually enable, particular forms of racism to persist because they cannot be identified or understood through liberalism’s critical vocabulary. This is why democratic racism remains so hard to define, because the political language that defines “Canada as a white, humanistic, tolerant, and accommodating society” obscures the persistent racial inequalities and discrimination in Canada. In what follows I will examine the particular way in which the “mythical norms that define Canada as white” rely on a devaluing of blackness and an exclusion of black people from the national imaginary.

Henry and Tator’s theory of democratic racism can be usefully linked to the work of critical race theorists such as Michael Brown, Sherene Razack, Richard Dyer, David Theo Goldberg and others. This is particularly true of their analysis of whiteness in Canadian media and the manner in which “democratic racism” relies on the notion of whiteness as invisible, disinterested and racially unmarked. In place of this conception of whiteness as neutral, recent analyses of whiteness have shown “the obvious and overlooked fact that whites are racially
interested and motivated” (Hartigan 1). Critics such as Richard Dyer (1997), John Hartigan (2005), Shannon Sullivan (2006) and Steve Garner (2007) attempt to strip the “normative privileged identity of its cloak of invisibility” (Garner 5). Dyer explains that “There is no more powerful position than that of being ‘just’ human” (2) and Steve Garner argues that while white must be understood to be a racial category, it is a category of identity that is, crucially “unlike any other, because it is the dominant, normalised location” (6; italics in original). Henry and Tator’s analysis reveals the unique position of whiteness as invisible, dominant and normalised within Canadian media and they also show how liberalism’s language of equality cannot account for the particular forms of privilege and power that are accessible to white Canadians. In a sense, democratic racism is an effect of what Charles Mills describes as “white supremacy” which “implies the existence of a system that not only privileges whites but is run by whites for white benefit” (31). Michael Brown et. al further clarify the nature of white privilege and supremacy through their analysis of accumulated advantage in Whitewashing Race: The Myth of a Color-Blind Society (2003). They argue that over the past 360 years, “whites have gained or accumulated opportunities, whereas African Americans and other racial groups have lost opportunities – they suffer from disaccumulation of the accoutrements of economic opportunity” (22; italics in original). Thus, “Understood this way, affirmative action has been in effect for 360 years, not 39. For the first 330 years, the deck was officially and legally stacked on behalf of whites and males” (25). The unique and privileged identity of whiteness and the concepts of accumulated advantage that white citizens enjoy under liberal democracy are rendered invisible by “democratic racism.”

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43 Brown et. al argue that “race is a relationship, not a set of characteristics one can ascribe to one group or another. Racial inequality stems from a system of power and exclusion in which whites accumulate economic opportunities and advantages while disaccumulation of economic opportunity disempowers black
Henry and Tator, Brown and others have critiqued the arguments of the “racial realists” (Brown et. al 7) who insist that the alleged colour-blindness of contemporary liberalism and multiculturalism will inevitably eradicate racism by treating all individuals as equals. Brown et. al argue that this is a form of democratic racism, and counter that “the color-blind ideal actually impedes efforts necessary to eliminate racial inequality. Formal color-blindness fails to recognize or address the deeply rooted institutional practices and long-term disaccumulation that sustains racial inequality” (58). Similarly, Linda Alcoff, commenting on the work of David Theo Goldberg, indicates liberalism’s inability to adequately contend with questions of difference through its language of rights and equality. She argues that “the universal sameness that was so important for the liberal self required a careful containment and taxonomy of difference. Where rights require sameness, difference must be either trivialized or contained in the Other across a firm and visible border” (5).

Sherene Razack sees an inherent colour-blindness at the core of liberal concepts of rights, contracts and the individual as the subject of liberalism. Razack argues that “Rights thinking is based on the liberal notion that we are all individuals who contract with one another to live in a society where each of us would have the maximum in personal freedom. Starting from this premise, there then are no marginalized communities ... and no historical relations of power” (17). She goes on to argue that “in any discussion of rights, it will be exceedingly difficult to introduce the notion of oppression of women by men (and whites by non-whites [sic]) because this oppression is the hidden cornerstone on which rests individual autonomy” (30). Razack argues that one of the major problems facing opponents of democratic racism is “not simply the failure of collective rights advocates to present their failings within
liberalism but the way in which the discussion is already regulated to obscure relations of domination” (33). Each of these critics indicates the specific ways in which democratic racism operates through the discourse of liberalism and the manner in which invisible white privilege “obscure[s] relations of domination” and accumulated advantages. These critics argue that liberalism’s privileging of the individual subject, its colour-blindness and its discourse of individual equality render it unable to contend with claims of oppression, racism and discrimination in ways that do not make claims according to a discourse of equality. These criticisms of liberalism provide a political and sociological framework that gives weight to Henry and Tator’s theory of “democratic racism.” In what follows I use Henry and Tator’s methodology to analyze the mainstream media coverage of Albert Johnson’s death and the subsequent manslaughter trial of the two policemen, Walter Cagnelli and William Inglis (the third officer on the scene, Gary Dicks, was not charged).

While it is difficult, if not impossible, to make a claim to know the facts concerning the life and death of Albert Johnson, there are some basic details which are generally agreed upon. On Sunday, August 26, 1979 Johnson was in the laneway behind his home at 52 Manchester Ave in Toronto. Around 1 p.m. in the afternoon, the police received a complaint from a neighbour who reported that Johnson was being loud and disruptive. Johnson was known to the police as they had had numerous encounters with him in the previous six months. Johnson claimed that he was a victim of police harassment on a regular basis whereas the police claimed that Johnson was mentally ill and was routinely involved with them. Three police officers agreed to meet at the

44Criticisms of these positions insist that they posit an inflexible and archaic version of liberalism and that modern liberalism has responded to these challenges through programs such as affirmative action, minority rights and recognition of systemic discrimination. Defenders of liberalism such as Will Kymlicka and Charles Taylor have attempted to demonstrate the flexibility of liberalism in Canada in responding to these challenges.
Johnson residence as none of them wanted to confront Johnson alone. The first two officers who arrived on the scene, Walter Cargnelli and William Inglis, decided to confront Johnson while the third officer, Gary Dicks, was en route. It is at this point that the events leading to or contributing to Johnson’s death come into dispute. The following is a list of the major claims made by the police and by Johnson’s family that are under dispute, in approximate chronological order:

- Johnson was cursing, shouting and being aggressive before the police arrived. One neighbour testified that he heard Johnson shouting “Kill all police” before the police arrived. Other neighbours claimed that they heard no swearing, shouting or aggressive behaviour coming from the back alley. One neighbour told reporters that he was sitting and talking, quietly, with Johnson minutes before the police arrived while another reported seeing him at church ten minutes before the shooting. (Mironowicz and Lavigne P1)

- Johnson cursed at the police officers when they arrived on the scene, shouted at them and their presence seemed to put him in a rage. Officer Cargnelli testified that “I said, ‘how’s it going today?’ He said, ‘Why don’t you ---- off, you bumbo clat.’ I asked him what he was cooking on the fire in the garage, and he said ‘Why don’t you ---- off, you bumbo clat? ---- off. If I had the chance, I’d kill you all.’” Some neighbours testified that they witnessed no such exchange while another neighbor testified that he heard Johnson say ‘get off my so-and-so property.’ Johnson then closed his garage and went inside his house ... the officers then “threw their hats on the hood of the car and ran towards the house. Finding the door locked, they broke it down” (Clarke, “Johnson killing murderous” 1).

- Johnson ran into his home and spat on police from a second-floor window. Forensic evidence revealed no saliva on any of the officers’ uniforms or on the screen of the window out of which Johnson is alleged to have spat.

- The police kicked in the locked back door of Johnson’s home and entered his home to arrest him because they feared for the safety of his family. Officer Cargnelli claimed that Johnson’s family was very frightened of his behaviour and that his children were screaming and crying. They allege that they entered the home to protect the children from their father. Neighbours testified that the scene inside the house seemed calm.

- Johnson resisted arrest after the police officers entered his home. Johnson’s wife, Monica, claimed that she attempted to protect Johnson from the police. Mrs. Johnson claims that the police attempted to arrest Johnson inside his home for disturbing the peace. When she asked Albert Johnson to go with the police, she recalls him saying, “No Monica, I’m not going this time. When I’m wrong I’ll go but this time I didn’t do anything” (Clarke, “Johnson killing murderous” 1). The police claim that Johnson resisted arrest, struggled with the police in the kitchen and then ran upstairs.

- The police followed Johnson to the bottom of the staircase at which point he reappeared, at the top of the staircase, holding what they believed was an axe. The ‘axe’ was a lawn edger which, after being forensically analyzed, revealed no fingerprints (forensic testing was not performed until nearly one month after the shooting and the evidence had not
been properly handled). Witnesses claim that they heard a policeman say “he’s got an axe” moments before the police shot him. The police claim they told Johnson to “drop it” while Mrs. Johnson and other witnesses never heard such a request.

- Johnson’s daughter claimed that she saw the police force Johnson into a kneeling position at the bottom of the stairs before shooting him. She claims that he was surrendering to police when he was shot. Johnson’s daughter’s claim matches with ballistics tests which confirm that the policeman’s bullet entered Johnson’s “abdomen at a 45 degree angle and travelled in a downward direction, meaning he had been lower than the gun” (Blatchford, “Blacks cry ‘shame’” A10). Johnson’s daughter’s testimony was discounted both by the OPP investigators (they felt she had been coached despite evidence indicating otherwise) and by the judge in the trial who instructed jurors to treat her testimony “almost with suspicion” (“What Judge Dunlop told the jury”).

- The police changed their story, initially claiming that they shot Johnson on the staircase. On the day of the incident Cargnelli claimed he fired a warning shot at Johnson on the staircase and then fired the second, fatal, shot at Johnson when he was on the second step of the staircase. One month after the incident, during an OPP interview, Cargnelli “changed his version to say Johnson jumped down the stairs and landed in a crouched position before he was shot” (“Cop changed statement, Johnson trial told”). This second version accords with the ballistic findings while the first version does not.

After the shooting occurred, police closed off access to the house to Johnson’s family and an ambulance rushed Johnson to Toronto Western Hospital where he died, at 7:30pm.

In addition to these disputes there are a number of disagreements concerning Johnson’s character, particularly his mental health, the reasons behind his unemployment and also whether he was harassed by the police in the months leading up to his death. Johnson lost his job in May of 1979 and, after being laid off, suffered an increasing number of mental breakdowns. While police maintain that they were called numerous times to arrest Johnson during these incidents,

45The reason for Johnson losing his job is also under dispute. The police defence insisted that his mental breakdowns began to affect his work, as reported in Contrast: “Buckley, president of Industrial Tire Ltd, a Mississauga tire plant where Johnson worked said that he fired Johnson in May 1979 as the outbursts became more frequent and often. This was five months before the shooting” (“Cop changed statement, Johnson trial told”). Johnson’s supporters claim that he was beaten by police which led to him being dismissed for no longer being physically capable of completing his work. Yet The Globe and Mail’s reporting of Buckley’s testimony explains Johnson’s dismissal. Globe reporter Vivienne Carriere writes that Buckley “told the jury that Mr. Johnson's behavior became strange and erratic after an incident in March, 1979, when immigration officials and members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police raided the plant and took away four workers who were in the country illegally. … One of the workers was Mr. Johnson's nephew, Mr. Buckley said, and although Mr. Johnson was not there at the time of the raid, he became very upset about it afterward” (Carriere, “Witnesses for constables testify Police were at Johnson’s at least twice before” 5).
Johnson and his family allege that the police harassed him and that his mental illness provided a convenient justification for that harassment and for the police killing. Johnson was arrested a number of times in the summer before his death and the charges were routinely dismissed by judges who saw no evidence of a substantial crime being committed. Johnson was also involved in a physical altercation with police in May 1979 and was injured so badly that he was hospitalized. Jim Arger, an Etobicoke high school teacher, shared a room with Johnson in the hospital and described Johnson as being “‘in terrible shape’ as a result of a beating he claimed he received from police. Arger said Johnson told him then “they (the police) are going to kill me” (Hluchy A3). Johnson reiterated his fear, that the police wanted to kill him, to the Ontario Human Rights Commission four times in the summer before he was killed. Ten days before Johnson’s death, Gail Guttentag of the OHRC wrote

Mr Johnson appeared increasingly desperate due to the increased harassment that he felt he had been subjected to. He had not been working, had lost his job following the incidents in May and had fallen behind in his mortgage. His biggest fear, he admitted, was that police would shoot him down. He repeated that he thought the police are trying to kill him, and have been making a concerted effort to continually and increasingly harass him. He feared that this would culminate in his own death.

(Blatchford, “What the jury didn’t hear in the Albert Johnson case” A10)

While Johnson and his family insisted that he was a victim of police harassment, the police insisted that Johnson was mentally unstable. The question of Johnson’s mental health would be one of the main concerns of the trial with the police alleging that Johnson was mentally unstable and Johnson’s family members alleging that what appeared to be mental instability was a response to his losing his job and police harassment. The media coverage of Johnson’s death and
the subsequent trial of the two police officers focuses on Johnson’s mental health, linking it to his status as an immigrant and his blackness all of which denigrate Johnson’s character and position him as the problematic other to conceptions of white Canadian normality. I argue that the coverage of the trial shifts from focusing on the white police officers to Johnson’s deviance which becomes a broader comment on what is seen as black deviance from a white, Canadian civil order. Within this public discourse Johnson becomes an exemplary figure of black deviance and the denigration of his character becomes part of a broader smearing of blackness in the Canadian public sphere. Johnson’s mental instability, his blackness and his status as an immigrant all provide the materials that determine the media’s discourse of white civility and black deviance.

The main headline on the front page of The Toronto Star on Monday, August 27, 1979 reads “Police Gun Down father of four waving lawn tool.” The article, by Don Duton, sensationalizes the details of Johnson’s death. Dutton writes, “Blood was running from a cut on Albert Johnson’s face and he was swinging what looked like an axe as he came down the narrow stairs in his old Manchester Ave. home – into a police bullet” (A1). The second paragraph describes how

The policemen, standing at the bottom of the stairs with their guns drawn had told Johnson to ‘drop it’. A warning shot was fired into the wall halfway up the stairs but the tall, black man kept swinging the “axe,” police said, and a second shot from Constable William Inglis’s gun slammed into his chest. The weapon was later found to be a lawn edger – about the size of a small spade with a crescent shaped blade about six inches long. (A1)
While these two opening paragraphs aim at an objective and factual tone, they also establish the interpretive frame within which Johnson’s death is reported. The headline that describes Johnson as a “father of four” who has been “gun[ned] down” by the police at once sympathizes with Johnson and also sensationalizes the events of the killing. Yet despite this sympathetic headline, the article’s point of view is closely aligned with the police account of events. Later court testimony reveals no evidence that Johnson is “swinging” the axe or that the police “had told Johnson to ‘drop it’.” The image of Johnson as he descends the staircase with blood “running” down his face and swinging his lawn-edger is one of an aggressive, mentally-disturbed man, an image that is reasserted in the following paragraph: “Johnson … had shouted a few minutes before the shooting, ‘I can’t take this no more’” (A1). Johnson’s mentally disturbed state is reconfirmed a few sentences later by Inspector Robert Stirling who claims that police received a complaint of a man “acting disorderly – creating a disturbance.” From the outset of their coverage, The Star’s perspective is closely aligned with that of the police although it is not marked as such. Instead, this opening description of Johnson’s death, which is contested in a number of substantial ways by his supporters, is unmarked, unassigned to any speaker and given the authority of objective fact. From the front page of the paper, the article continues on A3 where a photo of the shocked and frightened Johnson family (wife, Lemonica, and four children) is juxtaposed alongside an image of uniformed police standing guard outside the Johnson home.

It is on A3 that the article moves from the police narrative to include the perspective of Johnson’s wife, Lemonica (also known as Monica), her children and Mary McBean, Johnson’s sister. It is after the police account of Johnson’s death, which is presented as fact, that Dutton writes, “Johnson’s sister … blamed his problems on frequent visits by the police and wondered if racial prejudice were behind the complaints” (A3). Henry and Tator’s analysis of media coverage
of black Canadians and the police repeatedly finds that “The ‘black’ point of view in the article is referred to only later, in a ‘comments’ section of the article ... minority group speakers ... are seen as partisan, whereas white authorities, such as the police or the government, are simply seen as ethnically ‘neutral’” (188). Whereas the police account of the killing is presented as fact, McBean is described as weakly having “wondered” about the racism of the initial complaint against Johnson (the potential racism of the police, in shooting Johnson, is never raised) and as attempting to “blame” someone for his death. Similarly, Johnson’s 9 year-old daughter, Colsie, claimed that “the policemen made him kneel on the floor and that he was shot moments after he turned to a policeman to say he wasn’t going to do anything” (A3). This account of the circumstances of Johnson’s death, which directly contradicts the police account, is not mentioned until the fourth column of A3, long after the event has been framed by the official police version of events. Despite these two contradictory accounts of events, The Toronto Star frames the narrative through the police version of events, treating Colsie’s account as a matter of opinion overshadowed by the facts stated by the police. The discursive framework employed by The Star, The Toronto Sun, and The Globe and Mail reveals each paper’s alignment of their own viewpoint with the police version of events. As Henry and Tator argue, the black version of events is treated as unbelievable and is overshadowed by the white version of events. Police Inspector Stirling describes Colsie’s version of the killing as “completely inconsistent with what we’ve got here. She’s 7 years old, not a credible person” (Mironowicz and Lavigne P1) and these

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46 The Toronto Sun completely accepts the police account at face value, with Sun columnist Morton Shulman insisting (having only heard the police account) that if he were in the policeman’s position, he would have shot Johnson in the exact same manner (Shulman). The Globe and Mail at least canvassed homes in the area in an unsuccessful attempt to find the complainant who called the police. Similarly, they juxtapose Johnson’s daughter’s version of events with the version of events given by the police.

47 Colsie’s account would later be proven to be credible by ballistics tests whereas the police account would be later revised to match the ballistic evidence.
newspapers do little to challenge this discrediting and silencing of Colsie Johnson. This alignment between the police account of the events of Johnson’s death and the mainstream press’s reporting of the details of his death continues throughout the coverage.

*The Toronto Star* coverage of Johnson’s death and the police trial continued from August, 1979 to roughly December, 1980. The paper offered detailed reporting on Johnson’s life, his background as a Jamaican immigrant, the circumstances of his death and the trial of the two police officers. While Johnson’s history was completely open to public scrutiny, the race, cultural backgrounds, religious beliefs, political activities and ideological leanings of the three police officers were never discussed in the press. Indeed, the police officers are somewhat invisible figures throughout the coverage of the trial. The coverage is decidedly focused on Albert Johnson and this is part of the same discursive framework that privileges the testimony of white authority figures over that of black people. Whereas ‘the black perspective’ is seen as inherently biased by special interest concerns about racism and injustice, the white perspective is seen to be completely unencumbered by such concerns and offers an allegedly more disinterested account.

The coverage in the mainstream press aligns itself with the police version of events particularly in the link between whiteness and normalcy and their privileging of white perspectives. Johnson’s blackness signifies irrationality, deviance and criminality while the police officers’ whiteness is never raised in the trial and whiteness is seen to be invisible, objective and civil.

*The Toronto Star* repeatedly raises the question of Johnson’s possible mental illness and links it with his blackness and immigrant status⁴⁸ with the effect of marking Johnson as a deviant. For instance, the headline on Wed. August 29, 1979 reads “Albert Johnson ‘needed help’:

*Neighbors say police shooting victim sometimes ‘frightening’*” (Dutton and Mietkiewicz A2;

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⁴⁸ *The Toronto Star* routinely describes Johnson as an immigrant and as a Jamaican immigrant but never indicates whether he was a landed immigrant or a naturalized citizen.
italics in original). The reporters of the article interview Johnson’s neighbour, Robert Lackaye, who insists that since Johnson lost his job in May of 1979, his “mental problems … seemed to be getting worse.” Lackaye goes on to describe Johnson as sometimes “‘frightening’ because [Johnson] often carried a big stick in his hand and was shouting and cursing” and describes how, on the Friday before he died, “He was up on the garage roof, wearing a hat and well, a cape like Superman’s and waving a big stick.” Henry and Tator demonstrate that in mainstream media discourse, “criminal behaviour is associated with ‘deviants’ who fall outside social norms. Once criminal behaviour is attributed to social outsiders, it is only a short conceptual leap to associating crime with foreigners and foreignness in general with deviant, criminal behaviour” (181). This supports Garner’s argument that “All deviance in societies dominated by white people is measured as distance from selected white norms of a given society” (6). Not only does Johnson’s alleged deviance demonstrate the implicit coding of white normality and black deviance in the media coverage of his death, but it also suggests the manner in which Johnson is depicted as deviant in order to make his death acceptable. In a sense, the coverage of the trial transfers the deviance from the white police officers (who have killed a civilian) to the black victim in order to render Johnson’s death reasonable and justified under the circumstances. Henry and Tator note that “In a racially divided society, the assumptions and beliefs that underpin the dominant discourses of much of the media ... serve an important function: they explain, rationalize and resolve insupportable contradictions and tensions in society” (227). I propose that the contradictions of democratic racism that persist in liberal Canada and are made plainly apparent by the shooting of Albert Johnson are here explained and rationalized by marking Johnson as deviant. This has the effect of transferring the criminality of his death from the police onto Johnson and turns his death into an unavoidable tragedy.
In addition to Johnson’s mental health, his blackness is also one of the foremost ways in which he is constructed as deviant. *The Toronto Star* focuses not only on the link between Albert Johnson’s deviance and his black identity, but extends that coverage to the black people who support him and his family. Indeed, blackness becomes one of the dominant signifiers of deviance and criminality throughout *The Toronto Star*’s coverage. Like Johnson’s character, the collective black community in Canada is under investigation throughout the coverage and black Canadians are depicted as an irrational, problematic group within Canada. For instance, the headline on the Thursday after Johnson’s death reads “Angry Jamaicans shout at slaying probe team” (Hluchy). The headline of the article links “Angry” with “Jamaican” to depict black Canadians as irrational and problematic. It is unclear how Blatchford knew that all of the supporters at Johnson’s home were Jamaican but it doesn’t actually seem to matter as Jamaican becomes a catch-all signifier for ‘Angry, black, West-Indian’ in this discourse. These supporters are not identified as Canadians, citizens, friends or mourners, but rather are marked as Jamaican and thus not Canadian. In their analysis of media coverage of the infamous Toronto Just Desserts killing in 1990, Henry and Tator consider the signs Jamaican and black as they operate in the discursive framing of the crime. They argue that mainstream Canadian “media have constructed Jamaicans as people from a crime-ridden and poverty-stricken country who are good at sports and entertainment but who consistently present Canadian society with a myriad of social problems. In other words, they have been constructed quite clearly as problem people” (168). Grouping all of the Johnson supporters as Jamaicans (because they are black) and marking them as angry and deviant participates in this depiction of Jamaicans as “problem people.” The use of the word Jamaican creates an image of uncontrollable, irrational and aggressive black immigrants. The reporter writes that the group of supporters “became enraged when Johnson’s widow Lemonica, 29, told them her daughter
Colsie, 7, was ‘getting mixed up’ during 1½ hours of OPP questioning” and that some of the group “shouted to detectives that the OPP was trying to intimidate and confuse the child in order to discredit her story.” The supporters are described as having “shouted” and become “enraged” in their protestations over the O.P.P. interview, indicating the palpable threat that they pose to the officers. Where the officers are seen as invisible, professional, and unmarked by emotion, the “Jamaicans” are emotional, disruptive and irrational.49 The merits of Johnson’s supporters’ complaints are neither addressed nor assessed in the article; rather, their tone and affect is the reporter’s central concern.

This representation of blackness as signifying irrationality continues in The Toronto Star’s coverage of police testimony about the day of the killing. Cargnelli describes his initial encounter with Johnson, alleging that Johnson was “screaming ‘You ----ing bumboclat (a Jamaican curse)’ His eyes were bulging, his cheeks were puffed, and with that, he spat on us” (Blatchford, “I would have shot” A2). Blatchford then describes what Cargnelli and Inglis reportedly saw next: “as he and Inglis passed the window, Cargnelli told police they saw Johnson and heard ‘kids screaming and crying, an hysterical woman,’ and decided they’d better act’ … Johnson himself was ‘Ranting and raving, aggressive, very aggressive’” (A2). The police officers depict Johnson as irrational and mentally disturbed, and this irrationality is extended to the rest of the family in the depiction of the “kids screaming and crying, [and] an hysterical woman.” The only rational agents on the scene are the white police officers who “decided they’d better act.” Blatchford offers minimal journalistic framing of the officer’s account but instead presents it as though it were verifiable fact such that her article reads like a transcript of their testimony. Unlike Johnson’s relatives and supporters who are marked by their blackness, their physicality, their

49The Globe and Mail repeatedly describes Johnson as “the volatile Jamaican” (Globe, ‘Had nowhere to go’” P5).
gestures and their alleged emotional outbursts, the police officers’ accounts are re-told, transparently, such that it becomes linked with the authority of Blatchford’s reporting. The only instance where the police are marked physically or in terms of emotion occurs in an article the following day where Blatchford describes, “Visibly nervous and frequently stumbling over his words, Cargnelli insisted ‘women were screaming, children crying, and Albert Johnson ranting and raving’” (Blatchford, “Police feared ‘berserk’ man would hurt family” A2). The image of Officer Cargnelli as “Visibly nervous and frequently stumbling over his words” evokes sympathy for the officer. This is in direct contrast with the depiction of Johnson given in the headline of the same article: “Police feared ‘berserk’ man would hurt family, trial told.” Johnson is a “man gone berserk,” whom police feared would hurt his own family, whereas Cargnelli is only “visibly nervous.” Blatchford reports Cargnelli’s testimony almost complete transparently such that Blatchford’s narrative perspective is closely aligned with that of the police. Indeed the article is framed by focusing on what the “Police feared,” which has the effect of constructing the police officers as the victims and Johnson as the deviant aggressor. Henry and Tator describe this as “The Discourse of Blame the Victim, or white Victimization” (230; italics in original). This is a discourse which attempts to link blackness with a kind of irrationality and contrasts it with white rationality and honesty.

This focus on the alleged aggressive and emotional behaviour of black people persists throughout Blatchford’s coverage of the trial. At the end of the trial, after the policemen are found not-guilty by the all-white jury, Blatchford’s headline reads “blacks cry ‘shame’ as jury finds policemen not guilty.” The emotionality of the black supporters is foregrounded and presented as

50This depiction of Johnson and the scene inside the Johnson home directly conflicts with the testimony of other witnesses, including neighbours and Johnson’s sister who testified that the house was “quiet and calm until Inglis and Cargnelli broke into the kitchen” (Blatchford, “Police feared ‘berserk’ man would hurt family” A2).
an irrational response to the jury’s ‘finding’. Blatchford describes the defeated Mrs. Johnson’s departure from the courtroom: “With her four young children clutching to her coat and her 27-year-old sister, Bevolyn Williams shrieking at her side, 30-year-old Lemona [sic] Johnson was ushered to the escalator by the hostile group. Carefully watching were at least 15 uniformed Metro policemen” (A1). Black Canadians are described as crying, “shrieking” and “hostile,” while the police and reporter are “Carefully watching.” In the same article Blatchford writes that “Some members of the five-woman, seven-man jury appeared upset by the emotional outburst from Johnson relatives, though there were similar scenes throughout the trial. Almost daily witnesses were heckled by a handful of spectators in the second-floor courtroom, and at least a half-dozen times, Mrs. Johnson, her sister or Dudley Laws ... ran muttering and yelling from the room.” The black spectators and supporters of Mrs. Johnson are depicted as being unable to observe the court proceedings rationally and as prone to “emotional outburst.”

Blatchford’s linking of blackness, irrationality and deviance continues after the trial in her summary article entitled “What the jury didn’t hear in Albert Johnson case”:

the half-dozen blacks who regularly attended the trial ... were vocal in their disapproval of the way the trial proceeded. During testimony from Johnson’s 30-year-old widow, Lemona [sic], other relatives moaned and cried out, ‘Oh, my brother! My brother!’ When police officers gave evidence about Johnson’s bizarre behaviour, Mrs. Johnson was among those who grumbled and hissed.

51The Globe and Mail also focuses on the black spectators: “During his charge to the jury, Judge Dunlap studiously ignored a subdued chorus of clucks, whispers, moans and groans from the audience that rose slightly in volume whenever the judge mentioned the possibility of an acquittal” (Carriere and Fluxgold P1). The description of the white judge who “studiously ignored” the black “chorus of clucks, whispers, moans and groans” gives a sense of the media’s link between white rationality and objectivity and black emotionality and bias.
Outside the court, the scenes were often even more theatrical.

‘Why didn’t Albert kill one of them (the police)” Mrs Johnson shouted, weeping. ‘Than [sic] I would know justice is being done. …

‘This is a circus,’ one [policeman] whispered. It was one of the scenes the jurors never saw. There were others. And there was information about Johnson that was never presented to them. (A10)

Blatchford juxtaposes the supporters’ behavior with the policeman’s observation that “This is a circus,” aligning the newspaper’s perspective with that of the law (she is physically close enough to the policeman to hear him whisper). The details and language of this scene portray Mrs. Johnson and her supporters as a mob of black stereotypes who are “theatrical,” who “grumbled and hissed” and “moaned and cried out.” The white police officers, in contrast, “gave evidence” while the black observers are guilty of trying to turn the trial into a “circus.” What possible reason could there be for the jury to witness the scene described by Blatchford other than to indicate the irrationality of Johnson’s black supporters? Blatchford’s depiction accords with Henry and Tator’s observation that the “criminal activities of racialized minorities, although perpetrated by isolated individuals, are often interpreted as ‘group crime’” (154). Steve Garner confirms this in his observation that “the dominant white gaze on black peoples conflates them into an undifferentiated mass” (19) and indeed Blatchford repeatedly links Johnson’s individual deviance to a collective black deviance and criminality. Blatchford confirms this when she writes, at the beginning of her summative article, that the jury “weren’t asked to return a verdict on Albert Johnson, … sometimes known as ‘The black Dragon,’ but if they had been, they might have found him guilty of unhappiness and desperation and ruled his death almost unavoidable” (A10).

In the reporting on this case, there is a discursive sliding between black, irrational, immigrant,
problematic, deviant and criminal such that blackness becomes associated with a kind of irrationality and the police violence against Albert Johnson is read as a tragic, yet unavoidable, response to that irrationality. Consider, for instance, Sol Littman’s article, “Assessing the effects of the Johnson case” where he writes that “The small villages and urban slums of Jamaica give rise to large numbers of religious eccentrics. Nurtured on the Bible, driven by poverty, they look to Armageddon and maintain an uneasy relationship with the authorities of this world” (B4). Here it is Johnson’s cultural origins in “the small villages and urban slums of Jamaica” that are responsible for turning him into a religious eccentric who maintained “an uneasy relationship with the authorities of this world.” The clashes he had with police leading up to his murder are seen as problems inherent in Johnson’s Jamaican (which, when necessary, is linked to blackness) culture and identity. The question of whether there are cultural or racist problems in “the small villages and urban” centres of Canada is never considered, as white Canada is depicted as rational, normal and invisible. Dudley Laws, a regular supporter of Johnson and a leading figure in the black Toronto community, sums up the manner in which Johnson’s race, immigrant status and mental stability became the focus of the case: "Albert Johnson only was on trial in court. The police were never on trial. It is a disgrace" (Carriere and Fluxgold P1; italics in original).

The discourse employed by *The Toronto Star, The Globe and Mail* and *The Toronto Sun* in their depiction of Johnson relies on a particular construction of race which conceives of whiteness as rational, invisible and objective and blackness as irrational, emotional, deviant and foreign. Henry and Tator describe this as “The Discourse of Otherness” (231; italics in original) in which the discourse of the newspaper positions the deviant subject as ‘other’ to the reader, constructing a separation between the (racially-coded ‘white’) readers, reporters and officials and the ‘other’. The media depiction of Johnson employs a discourse of otherness whereby his mental
illness, his status as an unemployed immigrant, his size and his behaviour are all marshalled together under the sign of his blackness to mark him as foreign, criminal and deviant from a white Canadian norm. The mainstream media’s discursive framework operates through a barely-visible yet significant conception of whiteness as rational, invisible and civil. This concept of whiteness is described by Coleman in his analysis of White Civility where he argues that,

what has come to be known as English Canada is and has been ... a project of literary, among other forms of cultural, endeavour ... the central organizing problematic of this endeavour has been the formulation and elaboration of a specific form of whiteness based on a British model of civility. By means of this conflation of whiteness with civility, whiteness has been naturalized as the norm for English Canadian cultural identity (5)

Coleman offers a nuanced analysis of the manner in which whiteness in Canada is defined according to a certain form of British civility, which differentiates white Canadians from both First Nations people and non-white immigrants. Within multiculturalism, civility is a means of differentiating ‘real’ Canadians from the rest. Coleman argues that “civility itself is a positive value that is structurally ambivalent. This is to say that at the same time that civility involves the creation of justice and equality, it simultaneously creates borders to the sphere in which justice and equality are maintained” (9). Coleman’s stressing of the ambivalence of the concept of civility is a necessary supplement to Henry and Tator’s concept of “democratic racism” in Canada as Coleman’s ambivalent civility gets to the heart of how civility at once enables a discourse of liberal “justice and equality” and “creates borders” that regulate whom that justice and equality will include. The depictions of black people as deviant, emotional and irrational in the media’s coverage of ‘the Johnson trial’ reveals how the structures of white civility delimit access to the Canadian public sphere by marking certain subjects as uncivil (read: not white). The “grammar of
race” employed in the media’s coverage of the Johnson trial is one of white civility that subtly equates Canadians with white, civil behaviour and excludes black people from the public sphere. When Blatchford describes the scene at the Johnson household as one where “women were screaming, children crying, and Albert Johnson ranting and raving,” she contrasts the alleged incivility of black people with the civility of the white officers. Similarly, when she details the alleged emotional outbursts of Johnson’s black supporters she aligns her reporting with this discourse of white civility. Coleman’s analysis shows how the Canadian public sphere is mediated by a discourse of civility that excludes certain subjects and my analysis of the Albert Johnson coverage has shown how black Canadians are predominantly those that suffer that exclusion.

In one sense the killing of Albert Johnson reveals the contradictions in white civility as it is the white police officer, perhaps the figure for the border between Canadian, civil whiteness and un-Canadian, irrational, uncivil otherness, who is charged with the unlawful killing of a black man. Perhaps this figure of the white law-enforcement official who has crossed over into criminal activity and has perilously blurred the lines of civility brings to the surface the contradictions of white civility. Yet, in another, more terrifying sense, perhaps the police killing of Johnson and the discourse surrounding his death, of white civility and devalued blackness, reveals how the killing of non-white people is made possible by this discourse of white civility. In this sense, the discourse of white civility renders certain subjects killable by virtue of their lack of civility. In this reading, the police killing of Albert Johnson is not an exception or contradiction to the system of white civility but rather is internally consistent and, indeed, justified through this discourse of Canadian white civility. Sherene Razack has made the link between the production of whiteness as a privileged and exclusive identity and the devaluing of non-white subjects,
arguing that “the evictions of racialized peoples [from legal protection, citizenship and even the category of the human] make possible the production of white identities – as kin groups, families, nations” (Casting Out 7). Perhaps, then, there is, to borrow Achille Mbembe’s phrase, an element of “necropolitics” within the discourse of white civility such that the uncivil quality of non-white Canadians can be used to justify the state killing of a non-white subject. The discourse of white civility evicts Johnson outside the borders of civility which, in turn, renders his killing, in Blatchford’s terms, “almost unavoidable.” Garner argues that “The arbitrary imposition of life and death is one end of the spectrum of power relations that whiteness enacts” (14) and this seems to be the case in the discourse concerning Johnson’s death. I propose, with Coleman, that the project of white civility relies on the exclusion of non-civil, non-white others and that in the case of Albert Johnson, he is “marked as outside humanity” (Razack, Casting Out 6) and as the “living dead” (Mbembe 40; italics in original) such that his killing becomes tolerable.52 I propose that the mainstream media discourse of white civility marks Johnson as outside the realm of civil consideration and thus marks his death as “almost unavoidable.”

While the discourse of white civility is often invisible during the trial and only implied in the marginalization of black perspectives and devaluing of black opinions, there are occasional moments when this language of white civility is explicit. I have shown, for instance, Blatchford’s

52 Mbembe, building on the work of Giorgio Agamben and others, has argued that contemporary forms of sovereignty are “expressed predominantly as the right to kill” (16). To apply Mbembe’s analysis to Canada runs the risk of levelling the differences between the different modes of sovereignty at work in the slavery plantation system, colonies and a contemporary liberal democracy like Canada. There are certainly differences, of kind and degree, between each of these realms of the necropolitical. Yet my proposal that white Civility relies on the production of docile and killable racialized bodies indicates the continuities between the way in which subjects are marked and managed according to their race in each of these regimes. Mbembe argues that necropolitics is an extension of Foucault’s concept of biopower as a mode of control that “presupposes the distribution of human species into groups, the subdivision of the population into subgroups, and the establishment of a biological caesura between the ones and the others. This is what Foucault labels … racism” (17; italics in original). In this sense, Coleman’s white civility can be supplemented with an account of how power, channelled through the discourse and instruments of racism, regulates, manages, confines and kills the bodies on which it operates.
repeated contrasting of the alleged uncivil behaviour of Johnson’s black supporters with the civil behaviour of the all-white jury, judge and the police officers. Similarly, after the not-guilty verdict was announced by the jurors and the black supporters of Johnson “Walked from the courtroom, shouting and crying” (Blatchford, “Blacks Cry ‘shame’” A1). Judge Dunlap is described as having “told the jurors that he … regretted the demonstration they observed in response to their verdict. … I had wanted to say I was most pleased by the way the blacks and the whites and all the people who have come here have behaved,” Judge Dunlap told the remaining members of the audience, most of whom were police officers” (Carriere and Fluxgold P1). The judge’s differentiation between the behaviour of black and white people and his implied disappointment in the behaviour of black people further indicates his concern with the codes of civility. Similarly, The Globe & Mail reported that after the jury had delivered their verdict, “Judge Dunlap told the jurors their verdict ‘restores my faith in Canadian human beings, to see how you’ve behaved’” (Carriere and Fluxgold P1). The judge’s strange observation that his “faith in Canadian human beings” has been restored by both the jury’s verdict and their behaviour suggests how white civility is at the crux of this trial. This is just one of Dunlap’s many statements throughout the trial where he indicates that he wants the jury to rule in favour of the two police officers. Sol Littman writes that Dunlap “left little doubt that he trusted the policemen’s account of the incident and discounted the Johnson family’s evidence. On matters of law, the judge instructed the jury, he was supreme. His interpretation of the law left little room for the jurors to find the officers guilty” (Littman B1). While Dunlap’s bias is noticeable throughout the trial proceedings and the coverage of those proceedings, his statement concerning the fate of

53 The Globe & Mail reports that “Judge Dunlap told the jury that if Constable Inglis felt himself in danger when Mr. Johnson appeared with the lawn edger, he was entitled to use force … ‘It’s [sic] hard to have
“Canadian human beings” gestures towards the very structure of white civility which posits that there are “Canadian human beings” and other “human beings” organized according to barely-visible codes of civility. The judge’s statement indicates the race thinking that frames the discourse of the trial both within the courtroom and in the media’s coverage. That the judge decides to link, in praise, the jury’s acquittal with the way that “they’ve behaved” reveals that it is their behaviour, their reaffirmation of the codes of white civility that has confirmed them as “Canadian human beings.” The implicit contrast between their behaviour and the decidedly un-Canadian, non-white behavior of the Johnson supporters is clear.

The discourse of white civility is also present in readers’ responses to mainstream coverage of the trial. Many readers are outraged at the manner in which the media covers the Johnson killing and their outrage suggests the very crisis of white civility that organizes the discourse of the trial. The letters to the major Toronto newspapers are decisively outraged when police are challenged and are completely silent or approving when police are supported and Johnson is portrayed as deviant or criminal. From the outset of the coverage, readers play a major part in reaffirming the discourse of white civility and repeatedly link blackness with crime and deviance. Indeed, in Hall’s and Douglas Kellner’s terms, the readers virtually uniformly reproduce “Dominant readings” (Hall, “Encoding” 233) of the discourse of white civility and only disagree with the newspaper’s account when it conflicts with that discourse of white civility. In the “Letters to the Editor” section in The Toronto Star on Monday September 3, 1979, the week after Johnson’s death, the letters express anger towards not only the black community for

detached reflection in the face of an uplifted knife,’ Judge Dunlap told the jury” (Carriere and Fluxgold P1).

54 Any analysis of reader response to media discourse must consider the manner in which newspapers select their Letters to the Editor. It is entirely plausible that newspapers are not balanced in choosing which letters to publish but rather select a particular group of letters in order to represent a homogeneous public opinion where in fact public opinion is diverse and fragmented.
their claims that the police are racist but also towards The Toronto Star for their sympathetic depiction of Albert Johnson. V. Henry writes, “I sincerely hope that I am not the only Star reader who was dismayed and outraged at the headline ‘Police gun down father of four,’ … I would not attach any blame to them for shooting a man in the circumstances described. Nor do I understand what being a ‘father of four’ has to do with it.” The next letter, from Kenneth Thomson Jr., calls on reporters and readers alike to “put yourself in the police officer’s situation” and suggests that anyone in the position of Inglis and Cargnelli would have shot Albert Johnson in self defence. These letters indicate a strong critique of the discourse of the paper when it disrupts the usual discourse of black criminality and white civility. Both Henry and Thomson are happy to accept the police account of events and indeed the majority of letters call on reporters and readers to “put yourself in the police officer’s situation.” Other readers are angered by the suggestion that race was a factor in the police shooting of Albert Johnson. Mrs. Pearl Miller writes, “I’m getting sick and tired of the continual cries of ‘racism’ against our police force. In the latest regrettable shooting of Albert Johnson, given the same set of circumstances and under the same situation would the outcome have been any different if Johnson were white? I think not!” Robert Smith echoes Miller’s comments when he writes, “The Jamaican community can best serve justice in this case by treating the shooting as a matter of defence of life, instead of the catch-all excuse of ‘racism’. It has become by now the cheapest word in the English language and long stale.” Both Miller and Smith insist that not only should race be ignored as a possible factor in assessing

55 Miller must not have read the Toronto Star article written eleven days after Johnson’s death, headlined “Drunk who aimed rifle at police gets 2 months.” Gary Oakes reports, “An alcoholic who pointed a loaded rifle at a Metro police officer and fired a shot into the ceiling has been sentenced to two months in jail for possessing a dangerous weapon.” Police “ordered Markham to come out and he then pointed the rifle at Constable William Campbell. Campbell and the other officers told him to drop the weapon but Markham went back into the bedroom. The officers eventually talked Markham into giving up. Crown Attorney Bruce Young said the officers in the case “are to be commended for their actions – nobody got hurt.” Trotter said it was “most fortunate” no one was shot” (Oakes A3). Apparently the circumstances would have been much different for Johnson if he were white.
Johnson’s shooting, but both also presume police innocence in the matter. Miller describes the shooting as “regrettable” and as a “matter of defence of life,” immediately siding with the police account of events. Albert McKay, invokes race in a (barely) coded manner: “I can walk down any street in Toronto and not be attacked by a policeman. I cannot be sure of this regarding some other elements of our society. Instead of calling for a judicial inquiry, as you suggest, I think we should call for stricter immigration laws.” Here race is invoked to group black Torontonians together and mark them all as criminal, deviant and potential threats to white civility and order.

While Henry and Tator never address the media coverage of the Albert Johnson case, their analysis of the infamous “Just Desserts” killing in Toronto in 1990 offers a useful counterpoint to the coverage of the Albert Johnson case. In the Just Desserts killing, three black men robbed a café in midtown Toronto and killed a white patron. From the outset of the media coverage, the media employs a discourse of white civility and black criminality. In this instance, where the criminals are black and the victims are white, the language of unavoidable tragedy used to describe Johnson’s death is replaced with a language of complete outrage and anger towards the black and Caribbean communities. Christie Blatchford, who was the lead reporter in both cases, titles her lead article on the Just Desserts case “Good and Evil” and suggests that an “epic contest … was being waged in Toronto between ‘the forces of good and evil!’” (Henry and Tator 174). In a hyperbolic moment that is excessive even for Blatchford, she writes that the Just Desserts killing is “not the end of the world, and there will always be much to like about Toronto. But changed it is and a city’s safety and self-confidence, like a woman’s virginity, is lost only once and is never retrieved” (Henry and Tator 174). The contrast between the discourse adopted by mainstream press in this case and the Albert Johnson case is revealing. In the Just Desserts case the white victim is portrayed as a sympathetic victim and the black criminals are portrayed
as violent thugs who have destroyed Toronto’s innocence. In the Albert Johnson case, the black victim is portrayed as a troubled, deviant subject such that the white killers become the sympathetic figures who have been given the impossible task of having to manage this black man. In the Just Desserts case, the death of the victim is reprehensible and morally outrageous whereas Albert Johnson’s death is “tragic” (Blatchford, “Daughter’s testimony ruled unacceptable” A2) yet “unavoidable” (Blatchford, “Blacks Cry ‘shame’” A10).  

The discourse of white civility and black criminality is completely disrupted within the alternative press coverage of Albert Johnson’s death, particularly in the Toronto black community newspaper Contrast. Contrast was the major black newspaper in Toronto from the mid 1960s until the early 1990s. Contrast’s reporting on Albert Johnson situates his death within a discourse of Canadian racism, police violence, and anti-immigrant sentiment, and white supremacy. Throughout the coverage of Johnson’s death Contrast reporters, letter-writers and editors, link Johnson’s killing to the killing of Buddy Evans the year before and cite both as examples of a pattern of racism and violence committed against black people in Canada. While the writers in Contrast have a variety of views, and openly disagree with one another in the paper’s letters and editorials, what is repeated in many of these letters, articles and editorials that discuss Johnson’s death is an awareness of the structures of power and racist violence that white civility enacts upon black Canadians. Errol Townshend asks “is ‘racism’ or ‘racial tension’ really the central issue in

56 The fact that Blatchford never mentions the death of Albert Johnson in her coverage of the Just Desserts killings indicates that this discourse that links race and crime and is employed by The Star and others to solidify a sense of white civility and black criminality is selective in deciding which incidents to remember and resurrect and which incidents to forget and consign to historical irrelevance.

57 Frequent contributor Patrick Hunter rebukes the claim made by many of the mainstream papers that there is an identifiable black community or a united black opinion. He argues that “The term black community is a misnomer. There are a lot of black people, but there are several communities. There has seldom been anything that blacks in Toronto have been unified about, and there is no reason to believe that this has galvanized the community to the point of unanimity. There is very little that will” (Hunter, “Johnson may be the start of something big” 9).
this [Albert Johnson] situation? It is not. The central issue here is abuse of power by a cherished and potent agency of the state in its dealing with a powerless minority. That’s the issue Canadians must face, but won’t. And they won’t face it whether it’s ‘our beloved Mounties’ or ‘our terrific boys in blue’” (9). In the following issue of *Contrast*, John Harewood writes, “In our liberal democratic tradition we are brought up to believe that the state exists to serve the better interests of all its people. The truth is that the state serves the interests of those who have authority in it. And since the protection and security of the citizen often depend on those who are in authority, the citizen may hardly ever expect to receive them without their consent” (9). What is striking in each of these articles is each writer’s linking of the language of race to a language of power. In contrast to the semiotics of white civility that justifies Johnson’s death, Harewood, Townshend, and others read his death through the lens of power relations. The intersection of race and culture with power identified by Harewood, Townshend and others presents a decidedly different understanding of Johnson’s killing than the one offered in the mainstream press which attributes Johnson’s death to his own individual failings and to the un-Canadian behaviour of black immigrants and black Canadians. Mainstream accounts of Johnson’s death construct an image of a tragic misunderstanding between cultures whereas *Contrast* regularly indicates that power in Canada is distributed and affects subjects according to race. Johnson’s death, therefore, is an effect of this racist power imbalance.

Austin Clarke writes an editorial for *Contrast* concerning the Johnson killing in which he openly expresses his anger over this abuse of power. Clarke was originally hired to write his article for publication in *The Toronto Star*’s “Insight” section but it was rejected as “the article did not present the editor’s opinion” (Clarke, “Johnson Killing” 12). Entitled, “Why I Call Johnson killing Murderous” Clarke begins his letter with the argument that “People with power
do not have to give reasons for their conduct. They usually do not. And when their conduct is injurious to the powerless, such as the immigrant in this society, their explanation of their conduct is usually not logical. Their explanation is often unacceptable to the powerless. It tends to be, also, tendentious and patronizing” (12). Like Harewood and Townshend, Clarke situates the Johnson killing first within a discourse of power, and insists on the manner in which racism is felt as a form of powerlessness. Yet while Clarke describes “the immigrant in this society” as “powerless,” his insistence that the white “explanation” is “often unacceptable” suggests that there is a form of power in holding the police and white people to account. Clarke’s editorial, along with the other articles in *Contrast*, become a way of writing against the felt powerlessness of the mainstream media’s discourse of white civility and black deviance and of insisting that black people not only be treated as part of Canada but as full and equal citizens. The editorials and letters in *Contrast* express a form of power as they enable black people in Canada to critique the smearing and devaluing of blackness in the public sphere and engage in a form of blackening that public sphere. This capacity of writing to call power to account is evident in Clarke’s article when he writes that black Canadians “may have to stop asking the power, the people in authority, to put an end to racialism. We must instead, illustrate with the blood of Albert Johnson, the result of racialistic conduct. And then all we can do is to leave the society, including the powerful and the politically powerful, to face the naked evidence of their indecency” (12). Clarke’s call to “illustrate with the blood of Albert Johnson, the result of racialistic conduct” suggests the capacity of writing and narrative to disrupt the discursive formation of white civility that devalues black Canadian people. Clarke hopes to locate Johnson within the broader contexts of transnational and Canadian black struggle and link his death to historical and contemporary racism in Canada. Clarke initiates this act of illustration at the end of his article where his tone
shifts from plainly political and analytic language, to a more emotive and poetic language. He writes:

Anytime.anytime I have to expect. that a policeman. who dislikes my love of flowers. who feels that I am man. can kick in my door: overturn my Sunday pot of rice and peas: beat me while I am on bended knee. and then kill me. He can kill me in the presence of my children and my wife. He can do all those things to me. because he has the power. and the authority. Because he has determined.on his own. that I am his enemy. And also because he feels that his conduct.his indecency may not be chastisably reprehensible by his colleagues and his superiors. (12)

The shift in tone and the staccato sentences in this final section of the article indicate Clarke’s anger at the police shooting of Johnson as well as the way in which this death renders a generic political discourse inadequate to expressing this anger. While Clarke’s article begins with an articulate and philosophical statement about the relationship between power and race, it concludes in a different voice. The tone at the close of the article is far more personal and his anger towards the police violence is palpable. Certainly Clarke’s description of the police officer’s “indecency” reads like a parodic rewriting of the discourse of white civility. In this next section I examine Clarke’s and Brand’s textual representations of Albert Johnson and suggest how their narratives work against this smearing of blackness and this sense of powerlessness and engage in a blackening of the Canadian public sphere. I also argue that their texts engage in a blackening of Canadian history which attempts to both describe and work against the erasure of black histories from Canada.
What happened here, it is sad, very sad. What happened here is history.

History doesn’t enter here, life, if you call it that, on this small street is inconsequential
-Dionne Brand, *thirsty*, IV

Austin Clarke’s representations of Albert Johnson begin with his editorial in *Contrast* and continue throughout his entire writing career. Indeed, Johnson seems to haunt Clarke’s corpus. The most regular references to Albert Johnson appear in Clarke’s novel *More* which he wrote and revised over a thirty-year period. While early versions of *More* did not include references to Albert Johnson, later versions of the text, revised to focus primarily on a Caribbean domestic worker, include repeated references to Johnson’s death. In first drafts of the novel from the early 1980s, reports of Johnson’s death are heard on the radio while later versions of the novel begin with the main character dreaming of the imprint of the policeman’s boot that remains on Albert Johnson’s back doorway. After Clarke was unable to get early versions of *More* published, he transformed these early drafts into short stories which he released in the collection *In This City* (1992). There are numerous references to Albert Johnson in these short stories. In “Sometimes, A Motherless Child,” which focuses on an older domestic worker and her son in Toronto, there are explicit references to Albert Johnson’s death such as when the unnamed domestic worker goes to a hair salon and listens to conversations about Albert Johnson. Also there are references to Albert Johnson in “I’m Running For My Life” and the story contains an episode of police violence that mirrors Johnson’s death. References to Albert Johnson pervade *More* as Idora is haunted by what happened to “poor Mr. Albert Johnson” (100). Sitting at Yonge & Dundas, Idora sees a police officer patrolling and she imagines taking the policeman’s gun out of his holster and shooting him. As she fantasizes about shooting the policeman, she thinks, “My mind is remembering the
fate of poor Mr. Albert Johnson, whose picture of crucifixion I have on a wall in my apartment” (101). Idora imagines taking the policeman’s gun and shooting him “Three times. To make sure that if the first bullet did not hit him, the second one would! And the third one would kill-him-off! Dead! Yes! One for Mr. Albert Johnson. One for the other Jamaican, the Prince of Africa. And one for the future – for my son, as worthless as he is” (100 - 1). The repetition of threes in Idora’s fantasy links her desire for revenge against the police with the novel’s theme of religious and spiritual redemption. Idora insists on remembering these black men killed by the police and she retells their death through this religious imagery as part of her heretical blackening of Canada.

Throughout More, Idora continually returns to the figure of Albert Johnson, spurred on by her small collection of newspaper clippings, memories and by the links she makes between contemporary and historical violence against black people. Idora offers the following first-person account of her discovery of Albert Johnson’s life and death:

one afternoon, it was a Thursday, years ago, I was still working as a domestic ... [on] the four floors in that mansion, including the basement floor, where I first came upon the name Mr. Albert Johnson, a Jamaican. Lord have His Mercy! I saw the photograph of the killing. On the front page. And I had to read the full story. I read the story in a newspaper, the Star, I think. The newspaper told how the police went into that man’s home, on a Sunday, and shoot him dead! My God. My heart burned when I saw the picture in the newspaper. ... I still can’t get that picture out o’ my mind. I cut-out the clipping with a pair of scissors. It was from the newspaper in a drawer I found it in, and I have it in my bureau, up to today. I looked at it every night; for nights, at the beginning; and then, after a while, when the worse wore off, I would look at it just to remember the past, every November when I have to search for my Labello Lypsyl, to prevent my lips
from chapping and cracking, I would look at Mr. Johnson in the bureau drawer . . . just to remember. Even though I was told years later that he was killed in the month of August, I nevertheless associated his murder with the month of November, which was one of the most miserable months of my life in this country, because of the dreadful weather. And why, you tell me, why still can’t I get his face out o’ my mind? And I will tell you why. Every time, every year, every beginning of winter, every November, my mind goes back to that face. It was a August when the policeman blew his head to smithereens! Simple as that, the reason, I mean. Mr. Johnson’s head was covered in blood, in a drawer in the servants quarters my employers had assigned for me to sleep in. (55 – 6)

This complicated passage is very important in terms of Clarke’s conception of black history in Canada as well as the way in which he depicts Albert Johnson as both a figure for and the content of that history. Certainly Idora’s first-person oral narrative indicates the importance of oral storytelling to preserving black history in Canada. Dionne Brand, in her analysis of the oral histories of working black Canadian women, indicates how she “found that oral history opened up that vast and yet untapped well of events, knowledge, and experience that black women live and have lived in this country” (“weren’t allowed to go into the factory” 171). Brand’s analysis and Idora’s retelling both indicate the importance of narrative and orality to preserving black history. The Rosedale mansion that Idora works in is emblematic of rich, Canadian white civil society and Idora’s role in that mansion indicates the position of first and second-generation black Caribbean women in Canada who often arrived as ‘domestic servants’ in the 1960s and 1970s. As such, the location of the newspaper that describes Albert Johnson’s case in the basement of the mansion indicates the manner in which his history has been buried and relegated to the irrelevant and forgotten archives of a decidedly white Canadian history. It is in her role as a ‘domestic’ that
Idora discovers the Albert Johnson story in the basement of the home and this link between Idora’s status as a domestic and Johnson’s history is made again, at the end of the passage where Idora describes “Mr. Johnson’s head ... covered in blood, in a drawer in the servants quarters my employers had assigned for me to sleep in” (56). Linking Johnson’s death with Idora’s position in the servant’s quarters indicates the manner in which Clarke wants to position Johnson’s history as part of a broader history of exploitation of and violence against black people in Canada. Furthermore, while both Idora and Johnson appear to be powerless, Idora’s recovery of Johnson’s history and her own linking of his history with her position in the Rosedale mansion reveals how power is uneven and can be appropriated. The black presence in Canada is one that is barely tolerated, disavowed by white Canadians and relegated to the basement of national history. Yet Idora traverses that home and although she and Johnson have been marginalized, their presence in the home suggests that they are part of Canada and that Idora can reclaim power despite her marginalized position.

The article on Johnson’s death takes on a talismanic quality for Idora and becomes a means by which she remembers and narrates her own migration to Canada. She explains “I looked at it every night; for nights, at the beginning; and then, after a while, when the worse wore off, I would look at it just to remember the past, every November ... just to remember.” Finally, she explains, “Even though I was told years later that he was killed in the month of August, I nevertheless associated his murder with the month of November, which was one of the most miserable months of my life in this country, because of the dreadful weather ... Every time, every year, every beginning of winter, every November, my mind goes back to that face.” Idora’s memory of Albert Johnson is linked to her own memory of immigrating to Canada and of her domestic work. Additionally, her preservation of the newspaper article and her own personal
memories of Albert Johnson both situate her in the broader black Canadian community. Furthermore, Idora’s shifting of the month in which Albert Johnson was killed from August to November (the month in which the police officers were acquitted) and linking Johnson’s death to the oncoming “dreadful weather” indicates Idora’s creative reimagining of Johnson’s death which transforms this act of terrifying violence into a sign of the struggle and resilience of black people in Canada. If the dreadful weather of November can be read as not only a sign of the inhospitable Canadian environment but also of the cold reception of black people by white people in Canada, then Idora’s reimagining of Johnson’s death as occurring in November signifies the manner in which his killing is a pronounced example of white discrimination and the racism that she has encountered in Canada.

Idora’s accidental discovery and subsequent preservation of the Albert Johnson article thematizes the erasure of black Canadian history and Clarke’s project of blackening Canadian history. George Elliott Clarke describes this subaltern and repressed quality of black Canadian history, arguing that “The perpetual, white denial of Canada’s own history of slavery, segregation, and anti-black discrimination accents black invisibility” (Odysseys 35). G.E. Clarke discusses Canada’s denial of its own history of racism, slavery and discrimination but G.E. Clarke, and many others, also indicate the manner in which black Canadian subjects are rendered invisible or seen as outsiders in Canada through the repression and disavowal of black Canadian history. Cecil Foster, for instance, insists that black Canadians see “virtually no reflection of

58 McKittrick has shown the history of black people’s exclusion from Canada by virtue of the inhospitable weather. She explains that “Louis XIV gave limited approval to institute slavery in New France. In his statement sanctioning the institution, the monarch also commented that the project of slavery may fail in Canada – black slaves, he suggested, coming from such a different climate might perish due to the cold Canadian weather. That New France might be an uninhabitable site for blackness collapses biocentric categories and geographic categories. … the monarch’s comments did affirm a discourse through which black in/and Canada could be imagined – as unacceptably impossible or geographically inappropriate” (Demonic Grounds 136).
ourselves in the mainstream media and popular culture” (*Place Called Heaven* 30). In this sense, Idora’s archival work, of finding the newspaper, cutting out the article and preserving it for nearly thirty years in her drawer, indicates the manner in which both she and Austin Clarke are attempting to preserve an otherwise forgotten black Canadian presence and give voice to Johnson’s enforced silence. Idora, in her preservation of the newspaper article, and Clarke, in his fictive recreation of the struggle to preserve Johnson’s memory and historical importance, both blacken Canadian history through their acts of recovery and narration. McKittrick complicates this notion of black Canadian history as rediscovery in her insistence on the importance of “surprise” (91) as the “outcome of wonder” (91) in the discovery of black Canadian history. She writes,

> The element of surprise, then, holds black Canada in tension with the nation’s ceaseless outlawing of blackness: blackness is surprising because it should not be here, was not here before, was always here, is only momentarily here, was always over there (beyond Canada, for example). This means, then, that black people in Canada are also presumed surprises because they are “not here” and “here” simultaneously: they are, like blackness, unexpected, shocking, concealed in a landscape of systemic blackness.

(*Demonic Grounds* 93)

The surprise that McKittrick describes is the surprise of the archivist and researcher who is surprised to find that there were black people in Canada before the advent of multiculturalism or that there are black Canadians outside of Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. Yet this surprise and wonder is also the surprise black people provoke when they disrupt stereotypical and monolithic blackness. This sense of surprise is present in Idora’s discovery of this Albert Johnson article as she exclaims, “Lord have His Mercy! I saw the photograph of the killing. On the front page. And
I had to read the full story. ... The newspaper told how the police went into that man’s home, on a Sunday, and shoot him dead! My God. My heart burned when I saw the picture in the newspaper.” Idora’s exclamation of surprise is not just the surprise of discovering the details of Albert Johnson’s death, but also the surprising way in which she renders his death productive and makes it significant to her own experience of migration to and marginalization in Canada. Idora’s surprising rewriting of Albert Johnson’s death transforms the erasure of blackness in Canada into a blackening of Canada. Her surprise expresses the absented presence of Albert Johnson’s history and her rewriting of Johnson’s death reveals how that absented presence can be reimagined as a productive site of black expression rather than as immobilizing powerlessness. As such, Idora’s reimagining of the details of Johnson’s death indicates the strategies of adaptation that have enabled her to survive in Canada despite the deep discrimination and violence that she experiences.

I propose that black diasporic historical writing in Canada tends to employ the language of surprise and wonder to describe the absented presence of black history in Canada. Yet this surprise and wonder is also experienced by black people themselves when they disrupt stereotypes of monolithic blackness. This sense of surprise and wonder as forms of blackening is present throughout More and throughout Clarke’s deployment of the story of Albert Johnson in his writing. Later in the novel, Idora goes to a hair salon on Eglinton Ave. where the discussion turns to Albert Johnson:

the conversation turned and settled on their remembering the Jamaican man shot dead by the police. ‘And child! All that blood! What a thing, eh?’ ‘And did you see the pictures in the Star?’ ‘In all the papers, too!’ ‘Yes, they show you how that police went in with guns blazing ...’ ‘Toronto is the new Wild Wess!’ ‘And the two thrildren hiding behind she!
Scared as hell! . . . Two girls, I think I read in the Star . . . ‘And his wife, poor soul, down behind the table, hiding. From the bullets . . . her two hands covering her head and her two ears!’ ‘One picture show how the street was empty. And it was a morning. It must have been seven or eight. And the garden in the back was so nice, with such lovely red –’ ‘Roses!’ ‘Yes! The paper said they were roses!’ ‘My God, his roses, I hear, were so pretty! Just like back home in Jamaica . . . And all of a sudden two police appear, called by Mr. Johnson’s malicious neighbours! And you’re charged for breaking the peace! They complain your music is too loud. . . . ‘Sometimes I does wonder “Why worry”? ‘Yeah! Why break my ass?’ ‘Were they two police, or t’ree?’ . . . Idora didn’t think so many others knew, and cared, and remembered poor Mr. Johnson, even though none of them seemed to know him personally. For the first time, she learned that his wife, Mrs. Johnson, had to hide behind the dinner table! Or was it the chairs? . . . ‘Here in Toronto, they say your home is your castle . . . ‘What kind o’bullshit is that?’ ‘. . . no home is no castle, it own by a Negro . . . ’ (253 – 5; ellipses in original)

This section of the novel is filled with wonder and surprise as these women reconstruct the details of Johnson’s death. The newspaper depictions of black Canadians rarely report the actual statements of black people during the trial but instead depict black people “enraged,” “shrieking,” “ranting and raving and screaming” with the effect that black people are silenced within the newspaper’s discourse of white civility. Here, however, Clarke’s narrative gives voice to the concerns and memories of black people in ways that the mainstream media discourse never does. The closing statement of the passage, “no home is a castle, it own by a Negro,” marks a contrast between the mansion that Idora worked in and the basement apartment she lives in (as well as Johnson’s home) and gestures towards a general sense of unhomeliness for black people in
Canada. Yet what this passage reveals most clearly are the ways in which the black diasporic community engages in a blackening of Canadian history through their interpretations and retellings of the experience of marginalization and racism. This narrating of the events of Johnson’s death becomes a source of community empowerment that counters Canadian racism. The interpretation of newspaper articles and the sharing (and misreporting) of the details of Johnson’s death is a crucial means by which black Canadians affirm their presence in the nation. In the act of narration, of telling the story of Albert Johnson’s death, Idora and other people in the salon claim a space for themselves in the nation, offering surprising and creative reinterpretations and blackening this narrative of violent racism and drawing strength from it. I propose that Clarke’s articulation of wonder and surprise in his rendering of Johnson’s historical presence is one method by which he resignifies Johnson’s history, extricating it from a discourse of white civility that erases black presences in Canada. In place of this construction of Johnson as black tragedy and part of a general history of black powerlessness, Clarke depicts Johnson’s history along a continuum of absence and presence and shows how Johnson’s history is narrated and improvisationally used by black diasporic people in Canada to challenge the erasure of black histories in the nation, blackening its contours with their surprising and creative imputations of violent racism, and drawing strength from this strategic smearing of national unity.

In place of this construction of Johnson as one more figure in a general history of black powerlessness, Clarke traces Johnson's history along a continuum of absence and presence; the improvisational use of historical fact allows his characters to challenge the erasure of black histories and to render the nation inclusive of its black subjects. Clarke’s historical narratives express the forms of resistance that black Canadians use to combat that erasure and also record the actual existences of black history and black presence in Canada. Clarke’s narratives include
not only the details of Johnson’s death but also the manner in which those details are preserved, remembered and adapted by other black Canadians. In this sense, Clarke situates his historical narratives within a depiction of the erasure of black histories in Canada. Furthermore, Clarke’s rendering of Albert Johnson’s history at once indicates the erasure of black history in Canada, recovers that history, and employs strategies of wonder and adaptation that convert the absence of black histories into an expression of blackness in Canada.

Neil Bissoondath also writes the narrative of Albert Johnson, albeit in a concealed way, into his novel *The Innocence of Age* (1994). Bissoondath’s largely forgotten (and, indeed, forgettable) novel is a coming-of-age novel for middle-aged men, as it focuses on a number of men in Toronto who attempt to find their place in the city. Although there are some considered moments in the narrative, Bissoondath’s characters are too often flat, singular mouthpieces for clichéd political perspectives. Indeed, the plot reads much like a fictive case study in support of Bissoondath’s argument in *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism* (1994). The symbolic overloading of Bissoondath’s novel is present at the outset — the novel begins with a group of multicultural and mixed-race men sitting together in a downtown bar, “The Starting Gate,” (1) where one of them reads Plato’s “*The Republic*” (6; italics in original). United in their masculinity and their common desire to succeed in Canada, these men are uniformly unaware of and uninterested in the multicultural experiment of which they are a part. Throughout this novel the recurring themes of unity amongst men, desire between the sexes and a hope for a better life transcend any discussion of politics or racism. Indeed, the name of the bar that the men meet in, “The Starting Gate” has all the implications of liberal equality, equal opportunity and ‘colour-blindness’ that Bissoondath advocates in *Selling Illusions*. The implication is that, placed together
at the starting gate, this group of men have equal opportunity to succeed and it is up to them to ensure that they do.

Clarke's narratives link the lives of his characters to broader contexts, but Bissoondath's novel is suspicious of linking individual concerns to the politics and history of race and multiculturalism in Canada. When Bissoondath does represent history, racism or politics, they are depicted as irrelevant to the lives of his characters. The main figure in the novel, Pasco, is described as "watching the seven o'clock news on television. There was nothing new. Native unrest, immigration policy, the Soviet economy, African starvation, Ottawa corruption, lake-water pollution: each topic got its thirty or forty seconds, not enough to inform but quite sufficient to ensure that the world was, as ever, lurching from one crisis to another" (43).

Bissoondath’s narrative voice treats politics as a sort of irrelevant, media-driven sideshow of disaster, crises and celebrity that has little to do with the lives of the characters in the novel. While Pasco's perspective is certainly not Bissoondath's, this skepticism towards politics pervades the narrative. The narrative’s cynicism towards politics exemplifies Davey’s (1993) arguments about the features of the contemporary “post-national” Canadian novel which, as a group, disavow the relevance of the Canadian state and instead “suggest a world and a nation in which social structures no longer link regions or communities, political process is doubted, and individual alienation has become normal” (266). This is largely the Toronto described in Bissoondath’s writing, one that exists at the expense of any meaningful history of Canadian racism.59

59 This humanism doesn’t seem to apply to all of Bissoondath’s characters as there is definitely a sense of racism in some of his writing. For instance, the narrator gives the following description of a black character: "Viv was a black man in his fifties from Guyana. He was rarely without a smile, but one that seemed to emanate less from good humour than from that part of him, unmistakable in the eyes, that was sly and assessing. He was neither the fastest nor the most enthusiastic of workers, but the work usually all
Bissoondath’s rendering of Albert Johnson follows the novel’s pattern of scepticism towards making links between the political and personal dimensions of the lives of the characters. Montgomery, one of Pasco’s drinking buddies at “The Starting Gate,” is the figure in the novel whose death is based on Albert Johnson and he is killed by police in a manner very similar to Johnson. Montgomery is a black Grenadan immigrant who finds that his masculinity and patriarchal status are in crisis after his daughter begins disobeying his instructions. This crisis of masculinity leads to him arguing with his wife, to him developing a drinking problem and having trouble at work. Montgomery’s anger eventually renders him uncontrollable and violent and he is shot, in his home, by two police officers on a Sunday afternoon. Pasco’s friend, and fellow Starting Gate congregate, Pushpull, relates the events of Montgomery’s death to Pasco: “They say he came at them with a knife in the corridor outside his apartment. So they pumped two bullets into him. Self-defence’ ‘What the fuck were they doing there?’ ... ‘They say he threatened a neighbour. You believe that’” (279)? Bissoondath appropriates the details of Albert Johnson’s death for his novel but obscures them such that it becomes difficult to identify their historical origins. Yet the similarities between Montgomery and Johnson and the links between the events of the two shootings make it clear that Montgomery’s death is based on Albert Johnson’s death (some of the details seem to be borrowed from the history of Lester Donaldson who was also killed by the Toronto police). Bissoondath’s re-narration of Johnson’s death completely disconnects the narrative from any broader discourse of racism in Canada or from a history of police violence and instead constructs the shooting as a tragic, yet isolated, event that results from a confrontation between two confused and frightened people (the police officer, Kurt, and Montgomery). Bissoondath foreshadows the shooting by repeatedly describing the police officer 

got done anyway, thanks mostly to his wife, Deanna, a woman unfailingly pleasant despite her constant and obvious fatigue” (43).
who shoots Montgomery, Kurt, as an ultimately good but misguided individual. Kurt and his older partner, Sean, are regulars at Pasco’s diner and Sean confesses to Pasco that “Kurt’s a nice kid. Good name for him, by the way. Young and kind of high-strung, y’know? Granpa was in the force, dad was in the force, older brother’s in the RCMP up north. And now here’s junior lookin’ real nice in his uniform and packin’ a pistol.Likes to keep his hand on the butt whenever there’s a situation” (73). While the narrative attempts to humanize both the police and Montgomery, I argue that in order to humanize, the text ignores the structures of racism that make Montgomery’s death possible. Kurt is depicted as a “nice kid” who is “Young and kind of high-strung” and Pasco observes that Kurt has “watery and unsure eyes, eyes that undercut, even for a young boy, the confidence with which he spoke” (121). Later in the novel, Sean confesses to Pasco a “nightmare of being confronted by a gunman bursting from one of the apartments. ‘With all those doors ... there’s no place to go, nothing to do except crouch and fire’ (158 – 9). Bissoondath repeatedly foreshadows the eventual confrontation between Montgomery, Sean and Kurt and Pasco’s positioning between the two parties, sympathetic to both, places him in the position of an ideal liberal observer who is able to see both sides of the event and attributes blame to neither. Bissoondath’s rendering of the events of Albert Johnson’s murder, with his humanization of both Kurt and Montgomery and his portrayal of their confrontation as an inevitable tragedy resulting from fear and confusion, disconnects the killing from the history of police violence against black people and Canadian racism more generally. In effect, Bissoondath’s novel decontextualizes Johnson’s death so effectively that it becomes tragic and terrible, perhaps the underside to the Canadian multicultural program, but is never seen as part of a larger pattern of racism and violence against black people in Canada.
Both Pasco and the narrator are dismissive and suspicious of any attempt to attribute Montgomery’s death to racism. The novel’s broader suspicion of media discourse and politics is evident in its depiction of the public response to Montgomery’s death:

Cut to a group of solemn young people, many blacks with a few whites sprinkled among them, holding up signs: END RACISM NOW! CHARGE HIM WITH MURDER! KURB KOP KILLINGS! Cut to a man familiar from the news, the lawyer Pushpull had mentioned, a grave and elegant man: ‘Today is a day of sadness and anger for us ....’ Cut to another man, yet another face grown familiar in recent days, identified as a black activist, less polished than the lawyer but a dapper dresser still: ‘We will not take this lying down. I put this racist society on notice....’ Cut to a police spokesman announcing that the constable involved – cut to a photograph of Kurt – had been suspended with pay pending the outcome of an internal investigation. (284 – 5)

The narrative’s portrayal of this barrage of clichéd images of protest, dismayed public leaders, rhetorical black activists and solemn police spokesmen indicates a total disaffection with any attempt to link the shooting to a broader political discourse. The clichés offered by both the police and the protestors are seen as empty, self-serving responses to a crisis that is far more complicated than their rhetoric allows for. Even the language of “Cut to” indicates the narrative’s cynicism with both the content and the form of this media coverage, suggesting that it aims to scandalize and focus on the crisis but has little to offer in terms of a real understanding of the events of Montgomery’s death. Pasco reaffirms the narrative’s perspective on the coverage and debates concerning the shooting when he looks at “a copy of the Sun, the front page taken up with a colour portrait of Kurt on the left, a black-and-white one of Montgomery on the right. Pasco glanced at it briefly, rolled it up and put it next to the ruined pie in the garbage can” (283). For
Pasco and for the narrative more generally, Montgomery’s death is not a political issue and is not connected to broader questions of race, power and violence in Canada but is a tragic result of a confrontation between two equally well-intentioned, yet confused, men.

This decontextualization of Johnson’s killing is also present in the statements given by Montgomery’s son after his father’s death. The following exchange, at the end of the novel, between Pasco and Montgomery’s son articulates the narrative’s view of the correct response to Montgomery’s death:

‘she’s found herself people to listen to now’. ‘What d’you mean’? ‘They keep shoving cameras and microphones in front of her. Pasco didn’t have to ask who ‘they’ were. The controversy continued with demonstrations and press conferences, accusations flying back and forth. ‘Even Mammy’s getting caught up in it. She’s planning on joining a demonstration at Queen’s Park tomorrow’. ‘And you’? ‘I’ve told ‘em to fuck off, I don’t plan to be anybody’s victim. My sister, she likes that, eh? She likes being told she’s a victim’. ... Montgomery had had the kind of determination he was hearing in his son’s voice, the steady strength it took to insist on leading his life as he saw fit. He said, ‘I think you’re going to be all right’ (306).

The sister described in this passage is the same woman that disobeyed Montgomery which led to his breakdown and his eventual shooting. After disobeying her father she runs away and becomes a prostitute. Setting aside the absurd gender implications of the plot, the narrative depicts the sister’s (and even the “Mammy’s”) participation in protest and demonstration as “getting caught up in” (and enjoying) a victim role. Bissoondath’s retelling of Albert Johnson’s story decontextualizes the events of the shooting, disconnecting them from any broader understanding of police violence or racism in Canada. In place of an attempt to understand the links between the
shooting and systemic discrimination and racism, Bissoondath’s novel portrays Montgomery’s death as an isolated incident and the narrative praises the capacity of individuals to cope with trauma. Pasco sees that both Montgomery and his son have a “kind of determination ... the steady strength it took to insist on leading his life as he saw fit” (306) and it is this abstract, male, individual determination that is valued over the response given by Montgomery’s daughter to fall into the role of a victim. It is telling that at the end of the text, the novel is focalized on white Pasco as he assesses Montgomery’s death and Montgomery’s son’s response. This narrative implicitly endorses the liberal values of the determined individual triumphing over their social circumstances and it does so by erasing the history of systemic discrimination and violence against black people in Canada. In a sense, Bissoondath’s rendition of Albert Johnson’s death reinforces the codes of white civility but simply attempts to read this civility in a race-neutral manner. *The Innocence of Age* constructs the shooting as a tragedy but argues that there are no links between this shooting and any broader systemic discrimination and to claim that there are is to play politics.

Dionne Brand takes up the history of Albert Johnson’s death in a far more nuanced and challenging way than Neil Bissoondath as Brand’s texts thematize the historical erasure of Johnson’s death and convert that erasure into a surprising articulation of black history in Canada. The speaker’s claim in *thirsty*, that “History doesn’t enter here” can be read as an ironic statement about the manner in which Canadian History ignores the histories of black Canadians. Similarly, her statement that “life ... / on this small street is inconsequential” suggests that Johnson’s life had no consequences for the police and remains inconsequential to the national discourse that ignores him. Brand’s task throughout the poem seems to be at once to render Johnson’s life consequential to history and to identify the erasure of black history in Canada. The references to Johnson
throughout thirsty are very clear. Not only are the events of Alan’s death very similar to those of Johnson’s but the speaker also explains that “The house is still there, on Hallam Street, / still half-sleeping, ramshackled like wintering / bear” (XXI). As I have argued, the speaker’s task throughout the poem is to awaken the “wintering / bear” that is black history and consciousness in Canada. Brand has also explicitly discussed her own personal experience in the Albert Johnson case in a number of texts. In her essay “Bathurst,” from Bread Out of Stone she links the space of Bathurst and Bloor streets (“Bathurst Subway. I say it like home. It’s an uneasy saying” (67)) to her memories of black collective struggle and her involvement in advocating justice for Albert Johnson:

In 1978 we were working the four corners of the intersection just after the killing of Albert Johnson by the cops. Only months before they had killed Buddy Evans down on Spadina Avenue. And those who could have saved his life had said that he was just a nigger and left him to die. Now Albert Johnson was shot on the staircase in his house on Manchester. A Jewish sister and I were flyering the corners, she on the south-west, I on the north-east. It was for the rally to protest the killing of Albert Johnson. The rally would start on Manchester, go to Henson-Garvey Park (in 1978 some of us called Christie Pits the Henson-Garvey Park), then up Oakwood to the police station on Eglinton near Marlee. … The day of the rally not a cop showed up in uniform and the police station was locked and ghostly. We wanted to break down the doors but Dudley [Laws] said no. When Albert Johnson’s sister sang ‘By the rivers of Babylon’, water came to our eyes. We’ve been weeping ever since. One killing after another, one police acquittal after another. (74 – 5)

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60 Hallam Street is the next street from Albert Johnson’s residence on Manchester Avenue. His confrontation with the police occurred in the alleyway between Hallam and Manchester.
Brand remembers the details of the rally vividly, although she incorrectly states that it was held in 1978 when it was actually held in 1979. What I find compelling and puzzling about Brand’s description of her involvement with the Albert Johnson Defence Committee is the vivid details that she recalls and the documentary-like attention she gives to those details. She names the numerous activist groups operating around Bathurst and Bloor in the 1970s, and describes many of the major events for the black community in Toronto, all in the interests of documenting the fullness and complexity of black life in Toronto. Yet this insistence on recording black lives and history contrasts with the decidedly undetailed and abstract manner in which she represents the death of Albert Johnson in *thirsty*. In the poem, she renames Albert Johnson as Alan and changes his address from Manchester Avenue to Hallam Street. Also, the description that Brand gives of the Albert Johnson rally is recalled by the speaker in *thirsty* but with none of the same detail that appears in the prose piece: “Chloe sang *By the Rivers of Babylon*, then broke like cake into a falsetto of grief / raised in the air to summon an inattentive God” (XXI). While Brand and her speaker are clearly describing the same events (although in the poem it is Alan’s mother who sings, not his sister) it is up to the reader to make the necessary links. In one sense, Brand’s prosaic writing, particularly her essays, reveals a desire to record, archive and preserve the histories of black people in Toronto. In another sense, her poetry does not explicitly link her critique and political intervention to these particular cases of racism, violence and discrimination.⁶¹ Her poetry tends to discard the particular details of the histories upon which she draws and instead abstracts them in the interest of the poem. Perhaps Brand’s obscuring of the

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⁶¹This is also true of Brand’s earliest poetic reference to Albert Johnson in her collection *Primitive Offensive* (1981) which is a long poem broken up into Cantos. In Canto XI she writes “we die badly / always / public and graceless … / in our houses / on Sunday mornings / in Toronto / if the police say we’re wielding / machetes” (50). In this poem Brand links Johnson’s death to other violence committed against black people in Africa and the Caribbean without specifically mentioning Johnson’s name.
details of Johnson’s life and death thematizes the erasure and absenting of black presences in Canadian history. This is not necessarily contradictory to her stated project of “recovering history, history important only to me and women like me” (Bread 10) but rather complements that recovery by attending to the paradoxical presence of absence in black history in Canada. This paradoxical absented presence that structures Brand’s historical writing is evident in her depiction of Alan as a “slender lacuna” and “a curved caesura.” Furthermore, Brand’s rewriting of Johnson’s life and death renders his history relevant to black diasporic women as it focuses primarily on Johnson’s wife, daughter and mother (in addition to Johnson) and attempts to give them agency and a voice outside the shadow of Johnson’s death. These images of absence are rendered present in thirsty not simply to critique the “metaphysics of presence” or to gesture towards the irrecoverability of history but to foreground the ongoing absenting of black histories in Canada.

In addition to this thematizing of the very real absences of black history in Canada, Brand’s obscuring of the details of Albert Johnson’s death also enables her to productively reconstruct Johnson’s history and situate it within a broader narrative of black life and struggle in Canada. Like Austin Clarke’s attention to the acts of improvisation and narration that transform powerlessness into a form of agency, Brand’s obscuring of the details of Johnson’s history links his death to the broader struggle of black diasporic people. In a later section of “Bathurst,” Brand writes that “black people … living in Canada … have the task of the necessary retrieval of our stolen history. We do not wish to run from our history but to recover it; our history is to us redemptive and restorative; in as much as it binds us in a common pain it binds us in common quest for a balm for that pain” (80). Both Clarke and Brand depict Johnson’s death as a kind of transfiguration that rewrites the otherwise accidentally tragic events as redemptive for black
people in Canada. Their rewriting of Johnson’s death details the doubleness of the “common pain” as well as the “common quest for a balm for that pain” in a way that locates black histories in Canada and that suggests a broader thematic of black diasporic history in Canada. This is evident not only in the religious themes of Clarke’s and Brand’s rewriting but also in their depiction of the collective dimension of diasporic history. Brand’s repeated use of the terms “we” and “common” indicate her desire to abstract individual instances of historical suffering and make them speak to a collective history of “common pain” and common struggle. In this respect, Brand obscures the details of Albert Johnson’s death in order to articulate a collective language that can express shared black historical suffering and possibility. When she describes the collective mourning she notes, “We have been weeping ever since.” This is a different “we” than Brand expresses in the epigraph to this section and it is this articulation of “we,” of the collective black diasporic experience, that Brand hopes to “illustrate with the blood of Albert Johnson.”

In a seemingly paradoxical way, Brand’s lack of historical details in her decidedly historical poem contextualizes Johnson’s killing within the history of the black diaspora in a manner that is unavailable to the mainstream media discourse. As the speaker of *thirsty*mockingly describes,

So, a cop sashaying from a courthouse,

his moustache wide and bristling,

his wool coat draped across his body …

all muscle and grace, his virility in hand

his striking the match like a gunslinger ,…

history and modernity kissing here (XXVI)
The speaker’s linking of the image of the policeman with the repository of images of cowboys and gunslingers deconstructs the ‘realism’ of mainstream media discourse as not realist at all but rather a white romance between “history and modernity.” Furthermore the connection between “his” and “history” in the final two lines of the stanza marks the speaker’s suspicion of historical discourse and its privileging of white, male perspectives. This image of the white police officer celebrating and smiling after his acquittal is actually taken from another police murder of a black Canadian which Brand describes in an earlier essay: “the image on national television of the white officer acquitted in the Lester Donaldson killing, a victory cigar in his mouth, triumph over and disdain for black people on his face, smiling for the cameras” (*Bread* 156). Here the details of the Lester Donaldson killing are obscured and linked to Albert Johnson’s killing. The implications of this obscuring of the details of Albert Johnson’s death are that Brand’s *thirsty* becomes an articulation of the history of violence against black people in Canada and Albert Johnson’s death is one focalizing instance of that violence. Brand’s narrating of the events of Johnson’s death enables her to make white civility visible and show how it is supported by mainstream media discourse. Her depiction of the cop with “triumph and disdain for black people on his face” reveals her observation of the structures of racism that lie behind Johnson’s death. Her observation of that cop “smiling for the cameras” and “history and modernity kissing here” links that racism to the media coverage of Johnson’s death. Obscuring the details of Albert Johnson’s death enables Brand to retell the events of his death in a manner that links it to other instances of racism in Canada, to the historical erasure of black subjects in Canada and to make visible Canadian white civility. It is, paradoxically, this obscuring of the details of Johnson’s killing that enables Brand to engage in blackening Canadian history and cut through the mainstream discourses of white civility.
Brand’s poetic rendering of history also allows her to depict the details of Albert Johnson’s death that would be otherwise deemed irrelevant by traditional historical discourse and in the mainstream media coverage. The speaker explains, “It would matter to know him as a child, / after all, he’s dead when this begins / and no one so far has said a word about him / that wasn’t somehow immaculate with his disaster” (IX). Brand sets herself the task of writing about Albert Johnson and the women in his life without deeming them “somehow immaculate with his disaster” such that Johnson and these women are rendered as real people with full lives. Cutting through the mainstream discursive construction of Johnson as one-dimensional, mentally ill and deviant, enables Brand to render him as a complicated subject with hopes, dreams and desires. Her portrayal of Johnson as a real person rather than just as a cliché of violence, suffering, and tragic black masculinity supports McKittrick’s argument that there is an element of surprise and wonder that marks black lives in Canada, particularly the surprise that black people can “exist in a landscape of blacklessness and have “astonishingly” rich lives, which contradict the essential black subject” (93). Brand’s poem breaks out of the discursive trap of white civility by constructing the details of Johnson’s life in a fuller manner than the mainstream media discourse allows. Also, Brand’s poem shifts the focus of Johnson’s death to consider the lives of the women that are affected by his death. Mainstream media representations of Monica Johnson treat her strictly as a grieving widow; Brand, however, suggests that Johnson’s wife (named Julia in the poem) has a full existence that isn’t “immaculate with his disaster.” This writing of the women’s narratives in the poem accords with Brand’s (and others) stated desire in *We’re rooted here and they can’t pull us up – Essays in African Canadian Women’s History* (1994). In their criticism of black Canadian history Peggy Bristow, Afua Cooper, Brand and others write that in the few instances where women are represented in these histories, “the context … [they are placed] in is
primarily a familial one. They are rarely seen as historical actors in their own right. In effect, the work that these women performed and the energies they expended in the survival of those early communities are minimized” (6 – 7). Brand’s focus on Julia, Chloe and an unnamed daughter is a means by which she takes these women out of the familial context and beyond the cliches of mourning wife or fatherless daughter and instead provides them with real lives, desires, hopes and suffering. In this respect Brand’s poem works against the silencing of black women in the media depiction of the Johnson trial. Police Inspector Stirling’s description of Colsie Johnson’s testimony as “completely inconsistent with what we’ve got here. She’s … not a credible person” and Judge Dunlap’s instructions to the jury to “disregard evidence from Johnson’s 9 year old daughter Colsie” (Blatchford, “Blacks Cry ‘shame’” A3) reveals the extent to which black women are silenced within the mainstream media coverage of Johnson’s death. In this sense, Brand rewrites Johnson’s life and death to give voice to these women, and resists the erasure and silencing of black women’s histories. As such, thirsty is a recontextualization of Johnson’s death which simultaneously recovers the details of Johnson’s life and death and also rewrites his killing in such a manner that renders that history productive and enabling for black Canadian women.

I argued in Chapter One that Brand’s semiotics of black diasporic subjectivity are organized around depictions of delay and prolongation. In Chapter Two I argued that Clarke inscribes black diasporic subjectivity through depictions of mobility and immobility. In this chapter I have attempted to link those semiotics to both authors’ discursive concerns, particularly the manner in which their projects of blackening inflect the public sphere and resist the discourse of white civility that marks blackness as foreign, deviant and criminal. I have tried to link Clarke’s and Brand’s semiotics with their political and discursive concerns and argued that they reconstruct and reinterpret Johnson’s life and death in order to resist the erasure of black
presences from Canadian history, to provide a fuller account of Johnson’s life and to show the surprising ways in which black diasporic people resist structures of white civility. Brand attempts to fill in the details of Johnson’s life and of the women in his life, thus indicating that black Canadian history is not simply an endless repetition of tragedy. Clarke similarly attempts to reconstruct Johnson’s existence in a manner that depicts him as more than just the “essential [and tragic] black subject.” Rather than detail the silences and exclusions of black people in and from the public sphere, as Henry and Tator painstakingly do, Brand's and Clarke's narratives break that silence through their depiction of surprise and wonder. Brand and Clarke engage in a blackening of Canadian history in their rewriting of Johnson’s life and death in such a manner that his death becomes productive in articulating black presences and history in Canada. For both Brand and Clarke their acts of narration and reinterpretation work alongside acts of historical recovery in order to articulate black histories in Canada in a manner that disrupts discourses of white civility, black invisibility, and black deviance. George Elliott Clarke’s call to “recover their bodies” is supplemented with Austin Clarke’s insistence on the need to “illustrate with the blood of Albert Johnson” to express the necessary recovery of black history in Canada alongside the necessary reinterpretation of that history to work against the discourse of white civility. I have argued that contemporary forms of white civility construct Johnson as a deviant, uncivil and criminal subject thus rendering his death acceptable. This ‘necropolitics’ is challenged by Clarke’s and Brand’s recovery and narrating of Johnson’s life and death. If Mbembe sees, in necropolitics, the “creation of death-worlds” (40; italics in original) I propose that Brand and Clarke’s rewriting of Johnson’s death signifies life-worlds whereby the violent necropolitics of the state are rewritten, productively, in a manner that at once exposes Canadian racism and that offers a narrative of resistance against that racism. Brand's and Clarke's texts engage in a blackening of Canadian
history as well as of the Canadian public sphere. They intervene in the publics constituted by the mainstream media discourse and white Canadian history and narrate counter histories which challenge white civility. By rewriting the history of Johnson’s death, Clarke and Brand at once gesture towards the historical facts of Johnson’s life but also re-narrate his life such that his death productively re-situates black people within Canadian history.

Chapter 5: Race, Heritage and Recognition in Tessa McWatt’s Out of My Skin

It is a waste of time hating a mirror
or its reflection
instead of stopping the hand
that makes glass with distortions

-Audre Lorde “Good Mirrors are not cheap”

There is no worse deprivation, no worse privation, perhaps, than that of the losers in the symbolic struggle for recognition, for access to a socially recognized social being, in a word, to humanity.

-Pierre Bourdieu Pascalian Meditation 242

Although she could not remember the nightmare, it lay over her like a skin

-Dionne Brand In Another Place, Not Here 146

Working like a . . . reverse archaeologist

-Lupe Fiasco “The Cool”

The previous chapter analyzed democratic racism in the media coverage of Albert Johnson and demonstrated how the discourse of otherness functioned to abject Albert Johnson, his family
members and the black community from the nation. My analysis of the media coverage of Johnson’s death reveals the explicit and invisible forms of white civility that informed notions of Canadian citizenship prior to the passage of the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*. Yet Henry and Tator have also shown the continued presence of democratic racism in Canada long after the passage of the Act and the manner in which the discourse of otherness also informs contemporary notions of race in Canada. This discourse of otherness seems to be challenged by the Government of Canada’s stated claim, in the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*, that “all Canadians, whether by birth or by choice, enjoy equal status, [and] are entitled to the same rights, powers and privileges” (Preamble 1988 n. pag.). Further, the Act states that the Government of Canada “recognizes the diversity of Canadians as regards race, national or ethnic origin, colour and religion as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society and is committed to a policy of multiculturalism designed to preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians while working to achieve the equality of all Canadians in the economic, social, cultural and political life of Canada” (Preamble 1988 n. pag.). The *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* introduces a “Discourse of Tolerance” (Henry and Tator 234; italics in original) that aims to supplant the discourse of otherness but that, I argue, works in tandem with the abjection of black people from the nation.

This discourse of tolerance renders the discourse of otherness compatible with multiculturalism by stressing that “Canadian society is a model of tolerance and accommodation. The emphasis on these values suggests that though one must accept the idiosyncrasies of the *others*, the dominant culture is superior” (234; italics in original). Despite multiculturalism’s recognition of diversity, the claim that Canadians possess a “multicultural heritage” implicitly gestures towards “The ubiquitous *we* … the white dominant culture” (Henry and Tator 231; italics in original) who claim that heritage as their own. Further, the acts of recognition, preservation and enhancement
enshrined in the Act seem to be performed by just such an invisible and “ubiquitous we.” The Act attempts to identify this invisible Canadian "we," but this effort is undermined by its enunciative position which reinforces what it aims to challenge.

Dionne Brand’s and Austin Clarke’s work insists that Albert Johnson’s history is part of this “multicultural heritage of Canadians.” They question the meaning of that multicultural heritage by narrating the marginalized histories of black people in Canada and revealing how, despite what “The newspapers said,” this discourse of otherness has a long history in Canada. In Out of My Skin, Tessa McWatt continues their project of writing back to and blackening this multicultural heritage to reveal the way in which it continues to affect contemporary notions of citizenship and race. Like Brand’s and Clarke’s projects to write life worlds and “illustrate with the blood of Albert Johnson,” McWatt’s novel conjures diasporic memory in order to combat the erasure of black people from Canada. She thus blackens Canadian heritage by asking who decides what constitutes Canadian heritage and how the language of heritage functions to exclude black people from the nation. At the heart of McWatt’s critique of multiculturalism is the question of what constitutes the national and familial heritage of the nation. Her work employs the language of heritage and recognition while simultaneously disclosing its failings. McWatt expands Brand’s and Clarke's exclusive focus on black Canadians to consider the effects of heritage, racism, and nationalism on a much broader group of people including Francophone Canadians, First Nations people, black Canadians and white, Anglophone Canadians. McWatt’s novel extends the project of blackening in new ways by suggesting coalitions between aboriginal, raced, and sexed subjects in multicultural Canada. Her return to the meaning of heritage challenges Canadian multiculturalism, citizenship and nationalism on their own terms.
McWatt’s blackening of Canadian multiculturalism rewrites, from a black diasporic perspective, the terms of heritage and recognition enshrined in the Act. The language of heritage in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act helps to explain the cooperative relationship between the discourses of otherness and tolerance that each of these authors observes within multicultural Canada. Similarly, the language of recognition in the act separates those who share in Canadian heritage, and what that heritage includes, from those who do not. I argue that this language of heritage and recognition reveals the invisible we that pervades the discourse of the Act. The emphasis on heritage suggests an unbroken chain of Canadian values and a homogeneous conception of community that contrast with the stated diversity of Canadian multiculturalism.

Heritage also suggests generational continuity, biological uniformity and notions of citizenship as birthright that multiculturalism claims to critique. Amongst the definitions of heritage in the OED is the “fact of inheriting; inheritance, hereditary succession,” “That which comes from the circumstances of birth,” “the condition or state transmitted from ancestors,” and “Heirs collectively; lineage” (“heritage”). The Act paradoxically asserts that Canadian heritage is one of diversity and multiculturalism but does so using the language of heritage which suggests birthright, “hereditary succession” and biological descent. Out of My Skin seizes upon this tension and doubleness within the Act to insist that the heritage of the black diaspora is part of this “multicultural heritage of Canadians.” The metaphorical link between nation and family naturalizes the political arrangement of the nation and also abjects black people from Canadian nationality. Therefore Out of My Skin insists that Canada acknowledge its black heritage as well as its heritage of racism.

The protagonist of Out of My Skin is Daphne Baird, an adopted mixed-race woman in search of her biological family. Daphne was adopted by a white Scottish-Canadian couple as a
child and the novel begins with her attempting to learn about her own familial and cultural heritage. The narrative links Daphne’s questions about her own heritage to the ‘meaning’ of her body, particularly her skin, which Daphne continually attempts to decipher, in the hope that it signifies her true origins. Whereas the government of Canada “recognizes the diversity of Canadians as regards race, national or ethnic origin, colour and religion” Daphne herself cannot recognize her own race, national, or ethnic origin, colour or religion. The process of recognition fails when confronted with Daphne’s skin, this undecipherable hieroglyph of muddled origins.

Daphne’s search for origins is mediated by memory and language. Lily Cho’s argument that “one becomes diasporic through a complex process of memory and emergence” (21; italics in original) takes on a new meaning in Out of My Skin because Daphne herself has no memory of black diasporic life. While in Montreal, Daphne meets her biological aunt, Sheila Eyre. Sheila gives Daphne her grandfather’s diary that he kept while being held in a mental institution for multiple nervous breakdowns and his belief that he was white. Daphne pores over Gerald’s diary to learn about her own biological heritage and the reason behind her adoption. As Daphne reads her grandfather’s diary, she notes the similarities between her own unknown origins, Gerald’s ambiguous identity, and the manner in which both identities are damaged by an imputed blackness. Further, Gerald’s diaries detail the gradual erosion of his memories and destruction of his selfhood because he undergoes electroshock treatment. This sense of lost origins and absent memories is compounded when she discovers that knowledge of her biological family cannot offer the easy, comfortable identity that she desires. Her hope for a sure and stable identity rooted in family and biology is shattered when she learns that she is the product of an incestuous

62 Gerald’s madness, his belief that he is white (he has white ancestors) and his constant desire to shed his skin all link his diaries to Fanon’s work on the madness of racism and the racial-epidermal schema. Indeed, Gerald’s diaries are written in 1959, two years before Fanon published The Wretched of the Earth (1961).
relationship between her grandfather and his daughter. This distressing revelation locates violation at the origins of identity because Gerald’s incestuous relationship with Daphne’s mother is itself the product of colonialism’s violation of his dignity as a black man, coercing him to desire the gift of civilization instead.

Perhaps the central image of belonging and identity that Daphne contends with throughout the novel is that of the family, particularly in the sense that the family, as an organizing concept of identity, promises a single and secure heritage and thus a stable basis for identity. While Daphne’s immediate concern is with her own familial origins and her own mixed identity, the narrative links these individual questions of identity to concerns of Canadian national identity and belonging through its setting in Quebec, and its depiction of multicultural Canada and the Mohawk struggle at Oka. The narrative critiques the metaphor of nation-as-family, showing how it relies on an exclusive notion of heritage and justifies particular modes of inclusion and exclusion within the nation. The metaphor of the family subtly evokes racial difference to link biological homogeneity with national heritage, constructing categories of citizenship around racial and phenotypic lines. For instance, the novel depicts the Francophone residents of Chateauguay protesting the Oka occupation: “In front of Quincaillerie Boucher a group of men wrenched open a fire hydrant, letting the water shoot across the road. Shop windows were shattered by teenagers who accompanied the rioters. A family affair” (146). The narrator links the stable identity and belonging of family to the exclusionary and violent actions of the rioters whose concept of familial and national homogeneity allegedly justifies their claim over the land.

*Out of My Skin* shows how the nation and the family are fantasies of unity constituted through acts of exclusion. *notes on the Canadian family tree* (1960) collates information on
cultural, racial, and ethnic groups in Canada with the apparent aim of assimilating them into the fabric of the nation. The anonymously written Foreword highlights the tension between neutralizing and marking difference, because it claims to do no more than "provide factual information on many of the ethnic groups that comprise the Canadian population" (i). The Canadian population is "comprise[d]" of many different "ethnic groups." Interestingly, however, the text specifically excludes “Anglo-Saxon and French groups” because “much material [on these groups] is available in other forms” (i). The effect of this exclusion is that their presence becomes normalized and they are ethnically unmarked and racially invisible. Further, their exclusion supports the discourse of otherness such that this group of Canadians proper constitutes the observing, gazing we, the ideal reader of the text who observes the ethnically, racially and culturally marked remainder of the Canadian population. Historically speaking, this strategy that marks white, British Canadian as invisible and ethnically neutral is a recent instance in a long history of managing Canadian diversity. Richard Day’s (2000) analysis of notes and other texts shows how Canadian concepts of managing diversity have retained the same basic features that can be traced back to Herodotus’s first forays into cultural anthropology. He writes that techniques of marking, recording, and managing difference in Canada comply with “both the method of Herodotan ethnography and its obsession with the seven categories of cultural fact: place of residence and climate, language, dress, food, dwellings, religion, and political organization” (Day 128). These Herodotan categories structure notes and mark these groups as internal-others, at once part of the “canadian family tree” but also as distinct from the unmarked, culturally neutral, white Anglo-Saxon and French Canadian readership. These groups are marked as particularly and excessively ethnic, through repeated acts of “comparison with a standard assumed to be shared with the reader, but not with the object of the text” (Day 129). Anglo and
French white Canadians are seen as ethnically and racially unmarked and as occupying the central trunk of the Canadian family tree. Each ethnic group’s celebrated “Contributions to Canadian Society” are primarily examples of how that group has successfully assimilated itself to Anglo and French Canadian models. Similarly, while the metaphor of the family tree replaces the hierarchy of previous ethnic and racial studies (so much so that ethnic groups are listed alphabetically), the study is not completely able to eradicate the language of race from its analysis. The chapter entitled “Negroes,” attempts to account for all black Canadians despite their varied ethnic, cultural and national origins. Black Canadians prove to be an exception to the rule which replaces race with ethnicity and culture such that their blackness becomes the dominant (if not only) marker of their identity, trumping any national or cultural identifications.

The image of the family tree naturalizes nation and heritage, concealing the historical genesis of both. As Anne McClintock argues, “Historical progress is naturalized as an evolving family, while women as historical actors are disavowed and relegated to the realm of nature. History is thus figured as familial, while the family as an institution is seen as beyond history” (Imperial Leather 39; italics in original). McClintock goes on to argue that “The family trope is important for nationalism in at least two ways. First, it offers a ‘natural’ figure for sanctioning national hierarchy within a putative organic unity of interests. Second, it offers a ‘natural’ trope for figuring national time … The family offered an indispensable metaphoric figure by which national difference could be shaped into a single historic genesis narrative” (Dangerous Liaisons 91; italics in original). McClintock demonstrates how the metaphor of the family has the effect of naturalizing a national “genesis narrative” and privileges certain national constituencies as central
to the nation and marks other groups and histories as periphery.\footnote{Founding Black Nationalist Alexander Crummell confirms this mythologizing capacity of the nation-as-family metaphor when he insists that “Races, like families, are the organisms of God; and race feeling, like family feeling, is of divine origin. The extinction of race feeling is just as possible as the extinction of family feeling. Indeed, race is a family” (Appiah, “Racisms” 11; italics in original).} *notes on the canadian family tree*, for instance, makes no mention of First Nations people in Canada. Will Kymlicka (drawing on the work of Shulamith Firestone and Susan Moller Okin) has also described how the family is constructed as a microcosm of the political order in liberal discourse. He argues that while mainstream liberal thinkers “have officially proclaimed that their theories are based on the natural equality of individuals, they have in fact taken the male-headed family as the essential unit of political analysis; women’s interests are defined by, and submerged in, the family, which is taken to be their ‘natural’ position” (*Liberalism* 92). Both Kymlicka and McClintock argue that the metaphor of the nation-as-family naturalizes gendered conceptions of citizenship, thus foreclosing women’s access to the political and public spheres.

The metaphor of the nation-as-family employed in *notes on the Canadian family* is a particular mode of recognition whereby a dominant, culturally unmarked segment of society attempts to manage cultural difference, naturalize and dehistoricize the nation and fix power divisions in Canada. While the metaphor of the nation as family purports to describe the nation it is, in fact, an act of recognition which constitutes that which it claims to describe. The critique of both the family and the nation is based on the desired homogeneity and repression of difference that both models of community promote. Against the metaphor of the nation-as-family that promotes a particular notion of Canada, *Out of My Skin* rewrites the nation as a dispersed space that is continually rewritten by its diasporic inhabitants, thus locating diasporic double-consciousness within the nation. The metaphor of the nation as family constitutes an act of recognition which, in Foucault’s terms, articulates “power-knowledge relations” (*Discipline* 63).
The inscription of knowledge concerning Canada’s increasingly ethnic composition is simultaneously an operation of power in describing, cataloguing, positioning and managing that ethnicity as external to Canadian heritage.

*Out of My Skin* repeatedly returns to the fantasies of heritage and origins promoted by the metaphor of the nation-as-family. In one of the most crucial scenes in the novel, the narrator describes how

Daphne moved around to the side window facing the narrow driveway and peered into the bedroom. ... She pressed her face against the glass to see the source of the light she had seen from the street. ... On the left wall hung a different kind of photograph, a portrait of a big family. It was the kind of family which was full, bursting over, generation into generation of the same faces. Sisters . . . so many. Their faces varied, but each had something that connected it to the others: a line of the chin or a fold over the eye. Daphne lifted her forehead from the pane and moved down the alley toward the next window. ‘*Est-ce que je peux vous aider?*’ She leapt, bruising her shoulders as she flattened her back against the wall (75; italics in original)

Daphne is overwhelmed by the image of the "family which was full, bursting over, generation into generation of the same faces," thus rendering biological the "fantasy ... tree." Daphne finds the scene both fascinating and disturbing, as if the family "bursting over" is in danger of effacing and absorbing her otherness into its overflowing homogeneity. The ellipsis in "Sisters ... so many," marvellously suggests abundance rather than lack, underscoring her position outside the home looking in on a family that both compels and repulses her. The phrase "bursting over" foreshadows the passage describing the Chateauguay riots while inverting the "flood of immigrants" trope to describe the family portrait as a flood of genetic and filial homogeneity.
Finally, the interruption of Daphne’s gazing by a question posed to her in French disrupts the homogeneity of the Canadian family by recalling the presence of Quebec. This question, asked by Michel, is the first French spoken in the novel and suggests the manner in which English-Canadian fantasies of national unity repress French-Canadian presence, further indicating the necessary exclusions at work in the family-nation metaphor.

In Gerald’s diaries the family tree is transposed on to the colonial relation. Gerald writes, “The gift of civilization is like the gift of life, and a man does not turn his back on his father after he has learned to copulate” (107; italics in original). Gerald continues, “Today they’re all talking about politics and independence – fools. I can’t bear to listen … the son who rejects the authority of his father will blister and swell in the sun like a rotting carcass; that will be this country without Britain” (126; italics in original). Gerald imagines the colonial order as a kind of family romance and his position (perhaps an act of colonial mimicry) as the perfectly subjugated colonized subject leads him to imagine Guyana as the upstart son who has rejected “the authority of his father.” The colonial relation is seen in light of Oedipal strife; thus, his incestuous act can be interpreted as an expression of the sexual dynamics of colonialism. The novel suggests that there is an implicit violence and erasure of difference in both the structures of the family and the history of the nation that this metaphor attempts to obfuscate.

The Government of Canada’s repeated statement, in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, to “recognize the existence of communities whose members share a common origin” takes on

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64 Sylvia Söderlind has argued that Quebec’s presence in the nation has been repressed since the national invention of multiculturalism and that “English-Canadian writing – particularly critical writing – about nation is in a way doubly haunted: on the one hand by the particular role played by Quebec in the country’s history, and, on the other – perhaps as a result – by its own inability to acknowledge its indebtedness to Quebec for its self-definition as a nation” (“Ghost-National” 673). While Söderlind’s arguments are complicated and beyond the scope of this chapter, her claim that English-Canadian writing, and English-Canadian articulations of Canadian nationality are haunted by the presence of Quebec links the interruption of Daphne’s gazing with the question that is posed to her in French.
new meaning when those acts of recognition position those communities within the metaphor of the family. I argue that this metaphor constitutes an act of recognition that “recognize[s] and promote[s]” racial difference within a manageable metaphor of the family. Charles Taylor has famously argued, in “The Politics of Recognition,” that these acts of recognition are an important mode of political address in liberal democracy. Out Of My Skin reveals how tolerance relies on the metonymic function of skin as the signifier of authenticity. Gerald's abjection is absolute, but Daphne's hyphenation is no less pernicious for being bound up with the discourse of tolerance which must recognize otherness in order to suffer its existence.

Charles Taylor’s “The Politics of Recognition” is an attempt to address the democratic racism and structures of white invisibility that Henry and Tator identify in liberal discourse by insisting that multicultural societies must recognize the diverse identities of their citizens. Taylor’s argument addresses the question through a consideration of “the supposed links between recognition and identity, where “identity” designates something like an understanding of who we are, of our fundamental defining characteristics as human beings” (225). Taylor’s use of qualifiers throughout his argument indicates his own scepticism towards the connection between recognition and identity and what he sees as the philosophical blurriness of identity politics. Yet Taylor is cognizant of the link between misrecognition and political exclusion, writing that “our identity is partly shaped by the recognition of its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves” (225). Taylor argues that a subject’s political agency is affected by the manner in which that subject is
recognized by his or her society. He cites Fanon as one of the first to articulate the danger of misrecognition and understand “that the major weapon of the colonizers was the imposition of their image of the colonized on the subjugated people” (251). Taylor argues that in order to avoid this act of misrecognition and to ensure the equal political participation of all members of a multicultural society, liberal societies must practise “The Politics of Recognition” by which he means a mode of political address in which political society recognizes subjects as worthy of political consideration and agency despite diverse backgrounds, ethnicities and cultures, and despite conflicting conceptions of how society ought to be organized. Yet Taylor is also aware that the criteria of these acts of recognition can be biased towards reflecting the ideological and political perspective of the majority group that is engaged in the act of recognition. As such he advocates, with Hans-Georg Gadamer, for a “fusion of horizons” (252) between recognizer and recognized such that the framework of recognition is composed by both parties and not simply by the recognizer.

Taylor argues that identity politics emerge from both “the collapse of social hierarchies, which used to be the basis for honor” and “the development of the modern notion of identity, [which] has given rise to a politics of difference” (233). He writes that “against this notion of honor, we have the modern notion of dignity” and where honour was bestowed only on the (allegedly) honourable, now “we talk of the inherent ‘dignity of the human being’ ... The underlying premise here is that everyone shares in it” (226). It is as a result of this replacement of honour with dignity that “the forms of equal recognition” are rendered “essential to democratic culture” (227). Taylor links dignity to individual identity by arguing that the modern notion of a

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65 In this respect Taylor agrees with Kymlicka who stresses the importance of valuing culture and argues that “freedom is intimately linked with and dependent on culture” (Multicultural 75).
66 Of course the “major weapon[s] of the colonizers” were more likely to be gunpowder, ships and other forms of military power (and Fanon is certainly attuned to this) but Taylor’s point is well taken.
subject’s dignity requires that the subject exist in a manner that is true for them, that they articulate and live according to their own authentic identity; a condition he describes as “The ideal of authenticity” (30). He argues, borrowing from Johann Herder, that for contemporary conceptions of identity, “There is a certain way of being human that is my way. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else’s life. But this notion gives a new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of my life; I miss what being human is for me” (228; italics in original). The dignity at the heart of recognition depends on the subject living its life in its own particular authentic way; true to itself. This element of recognition relies on a notion of the authentic subject, the subject that is true to themselves. There is a tension, however, between this authentic self and what Taylor sees as the fundamental dialogical quality of identity. He writes, “We define our identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us” (230). He goes on to state, in stronger terms, that “This crucial feature of human life is its fundamentally dialogical character” (230; italics in original). It is unclear how Taylor reconciles this authentic idea of the self, the way of “being human that is my way” with the “fundamentally dialogical character” of human identity; if human identity is fundamentally dialogical, then there is no identity or way of living that is unequivocally “my way” or that is not shaped through dialogical process. Out of My Skin exploits this tension between the authentic and the dialogical in its critique of recognition, particularly the manner in which the politics of recognition tends to fix and polarize identity and difference.

One major critique of Taylor’s politics of recognition is his inadequate attention to the manner in which race structures the act of recognition (Appiah 1994). The challenges posed to liberalism’s discourse of equality by the language and politics of race are only an implicit
consideration in his argument that “misrecognition shows not just a lack of due respect. It can
inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred” (226). Indeed, Taylor’s
narrative of the emergence of the modern subject depicts it as emerging strictly from a European
context and not at all dialogically. His claim about the dangers of misrecognition does not
adequately consider the manner in which a discourse of otherness and racial exclusion is
produced alongside liberal discourses of tolerance and equality. David Theo Goldberg observes
that not only is “Race one of the central conceptual inventions of modernity” but “The more
explicit universal modernity’s commitments, the more open it is to and the more determined it is
by the likes of racial specificity and racist exclusivity. ... The way in which racial
characterizations are articulated in and through, and so come in part to define liberalism, will thus
serve to locate the paradox at the center of the modern project” (4; italics in original). Taylor’s
inattention to race is exposed by Goldberg’s insistence on the relationship between liberalism’s
increasing claim to universality and its increasing racial exclusivity. Furthermore, Taylor’s
argument does not attend to the uneven distribution of civility and dignity, particularly the
manner in which black subjects have been and continue to be denied basic dignity. Even if there
is an inherent “dignity of the human being,” critics such as Sylvia Wynter, Paul Gilroy and Cecil
Foster have differently demonstrated the manner in which blackness has signified the borders or
outright exclusion from that category of the civil. The analysis of the Albert Johnson case in the
previous chapter reveals how the misrecognition of black people results in the denial of their
dignity as human beings. Johnson’s depiction in the media reveals the forms of “authentic”
blackness that these acts of recognition will discover/project when confronted with a black
subject.
In *Blackness and Modernity* (2007), Cecil Foster describes the misrecognition of blackness in almost exactly Taylor’s terms:

For a specific group of humans, however, the black colour of their skin is rationally and objectively associated ... with the undesirable and inferior ... skin colour is recognized as a visible approximation of inner qualities and virtues, or it is coupled with specific stereotypes and virtues that are uniformly common and basic to all members of this specific and inferior group ... and is used as a means or rationale for exclusion. (10)

Foster argues that black skin is treated as a “visible approximation of inner qualities and virtues,” which Taylor describes as the “inner being or essence” of the subject. Foster also indicates the manner in which the category of black in liberal societies is constructed according to “what is projected onto the black body discursively or what is read into the body, rather that [sic] what meaning the body or consciousness offers up on its own” (xxi). In his analysis of the meaning of blackness in Canada, Foster argues that blackness is primarily an effect of the “appearance or the somatic [qualities of the subject], based racially and genetically on the colour of the epidermal skin layer that is perceived to be encoded with values that signify good or evil. This has become the predominant way for discerning who is black in modern society” (94). Foster’s argument that blackness is linked to the “appearance or the somatic” qualities of the subject intervenes in Taylor’s recognition to suggest the manner in which blackness depends on a particular reading of skin. The act of recognition treats black skin as signifying an authentic kernel of blackness. This is precisely the mode of recognition that Gerald in *Out of My Skin* is subjected to when his belief that he is white is not shared by his society. Taylor’s inattention to race leads to his overestimating the capacity of recognition to afford a space of agency and self-definition to black subjects. In making the skin the irrefutable proof of blackness, the discourse of recognition consigns multiple,
diverse subjects to the category of “essential, and unchangeable,” blackness. Furthermore, Foster’s arguments indicate the manner in which recognition, particularly as it implicates black subjects, is contingent upon a particularly racialized gaze.

Richard Day offers another critique of Taylor’s recognition, arguing that “the recognition that Taylor speaks of is not equal, reciprocal, and freely given, but a partial and grudgingly bestowed gift from a canonical Self group to a series of problematic Others” (217; italics in original). Day argues that the positions of recognizer and recognized (which he links to the Hegelian positions of Master and Slave) remain undisturbed in Taylor’s conception of recognition and that it is the dominant and unmarked “Self” who is in the position to recognize the “problematic Others.” Day’s language of recognition as a gift recalls Gerald’s description of the colonial order as akin to a “gift of civilization” and “the gift of life” (107; italics in original). Day also challenges Taylor’s reliance on authentic identity, arguing that “recognition for Taylor ultimately depends upon correct outward perception of a pre-existing inner being or essence. It is, in this sense, in keeping with modern essentialist theories of identity” (35). Taylor’s recognition reads the “certain way of being human that is my way” by validating, recognizing and solidifying the “inner being or essence” of a group or individual identity. When confronted with a racialized subject, this “inner being or essence” is validated through recognition which depends on the skin operating as the metonymic signifier of authenticity. Indeed, Foster argues that authentic, black identity relies on “Seeing ... [as the] privileged ... act of knowing; ... what was seen was considered to be the real or ... genuine, the essential, and unchangeable” (132). Foster’s claim develops Day’s critique that recognition relies on the “correct outward perception of a pre-existing inner being or essence” to reveal how black skin becomes implacable.
*Out of My Skin* stages the act of recognition in order to show how the emphasis on identity as authenticity produces immobilizing and confining racial identities. Daphne’s repeated failure to identify her own “inner being or essence” reveals the limitations of such conceptions of identity. The very title of the novel reveals the thematic concern of separating identity from skin. Taylor’s argument that there is, for all subjects, a “certain way of being human that is my way” recalls a schoolteacher’s exasperated insistence to Daphne that “people are certain things, like Japanese, Chinese . . . things like that” (16). Both Taylor and Daphne’s teacher insist that “people are certain things” and that there is a “certain way of being human that is my way.” It is the mention of the word “Negro” in a story that prompts the teacher to engage in this lesson in identity and recognition, bluntly asking “What are you, anyway, Daphne” (16)? The “anyway” of Daphne’s teacher’s question expresses the frustration of the liberal confronted with an unrecognizable subject. After reading the word “Negro” in a story, the teacher asks, “Well, does anyone know what a Negro is” to which Daphne’s classmate responds “Yeah, Daphne. . . . ‘Oh no, no, not Daphne,’ the teacher corrected. ‘No that’s different. Quite different.’ . . . The teacher paused before addressing her, ‘What are you, anyway, Daphne’” (16)? That it is the mention of blackness, particularly in the uncomfortable politeness of “Negro,” which leads to this act of recognition, reveals how the act of recognition reads the racialized body as a metonym for a particular racial identity. Further, the teacher’s repetition of “no, no, not Daphne . . . No that’s different” indicates at once the devaluing of blackness in the structure of recognition and also the uncertainty and anxiety that the teacher feels in her inability to place Daphne’s “Quite different” appearance. Daphne’s response to the teacher’s inquiry expresses the confusion and anxiety raised by such a probing interrogation: “Daphne sat mute, her cheek beginning to quiver, her eyes to water. She’d never before considered the question . . . They are? What things? Daphne folded
her arms on the desk and cradled her head in them” (16; italics in original). Daphne possesses no authentic identity to recognize and the discourses of otherness and tolerance operate in tandem to silence her.

Recognition relies on an internally consistent identity that the recognizer aims to discover, what Taylor describes as the “inner being or essence” of a subject that expresses their “certain way of being human.” Daphne’s mute response discredits the “fundamentally dialogic” nature of recognition. In another section of the novel Sheila asks Daphne what she tells people when they ask where she is from. Daphne responds, “Nothing” (81) and her “Nothing” invokes both her silence and her absented origins. Throughout Out of My Skin there are multiple failed attempts to recognize the inner essence or kernel of Daphne’s identity and indeed the bulk of the narrative is concerned with Daphne’s resistance to these attempts to discover what “certain things” Daphne could be. Daphne’s struggle to assert her identity at once contends with the logic of recognition and with the absented heritage of her birth, her adoption and Gerald’s madness. What is the meaning of heritage for Daphne who knew “Nothing” about her heritage or identity for most of her life? What is the true recognizable identity of black diasporic people whose heritage is described by Brand as one of collective loss, forgotten pasts and absented histories?

Out of My Skin’s critique of authentic identity is represented in the repeated undermining of demarcations of inside and outside. The logic of inside and outside gestures towards the abjection of black people from the nation and also suggests the manner in which Taylor’s recognition relies on the outside to bespeak the inside. Indeed the stable identity of the individual and nation requires a policing of the borders between inside and outside.67 This concern with the

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67Judith Butler deconstructs the positions of inside and outside, insisting that both “remain linguistic terms that facilitate and articulate a set of fantasies, fears and desires. ‘Inner’ and ‘outer’ make sense only with reference to a mediating boundary that strives for stability” (Gender Trouble 182).
inside and outside of subjectivity, identity and community pervades *Out of My Skin* both in the explicit references to these spatial configurations and in the representations of the body which undermine this stark delimitation. As the novel begins, Daphne is hiding in the bushes of a garden, secretly gazing into a house and the narrator explains that “Up close it was all disappointing” (1). This opening sentence indicates the importance of visuality to the novel and to structuring the division between inside and outside as Daphne’s gaze cannot access the inside of the authentic familial scene. As she looks through the window of the home she tries to reach into the room but is “surprised when her hand hit the glass … she remembered she was on the outside” (2). This reciprocity between inside and outside is reinforced in the surfaces, glass windows, mirrors, and pools of water that litter the narrative, all of which are dependent for their meaning on the fragmented and elusive point of view. The novel routinely undermines the division between inside and outside, either breaking down the relationship between the two or thematizing them in such a way as to demonstrate the constructedness of the concept of the ‘inside’ of identity. This exploration and critique of the categories of inside and outside are one of the central ways that the novel critiques the concepts of national and familial belonging, of being on the ‘inside’ of the community, and of having a true identity lodged inside the subject.

I argue that Taylor’s conception of recognition relies on a visual composition of the body that reads the outside of skin as signifying an inside of authentic identity. This visualization is rendered explicit in the following advertisement from the Canadian Ministry of Multiculturalism which appeared in the May 1980 edition of *Contrast*:
This advertisement engages in an act of recognition by sustaining the visual register in which it operates. The looking glass that the Canadian is invited to peer into, suggests that all Canadians, regardless of ethnic, cultural or racial distinction, are “the typical Canadian.” The advertisement reaffirms the link between phenotypic difference, state recognition and the field of visuality, suggesting that “the typical Canadian” does not necessarily look like anything in particular but rather is both diverse and innumerable. The advertisement hails Canadians to recognize
themselves in the mirror. In one sense the message of the advertisement is that past conceptions of what it means to be a typical Canadian are being replaced by this new act of recognition which aims to include cultural, ethnic and racial difference. In another sense, however, the metaphorical use of the mirror situates this act of recognition within the field of visuality such that the positions of the subject and object of recognition remain undisturbed. The voice of state interpellation which calls on the multicultural subject to “Take a look in the mirror” at once welcomes that subject into the new inclusive Canadian identity but does so by recognizing, ‘enhancing’ (Canadian Multiculturalism Act 3.1(d)) and crystallizing that subject’s difference. The visual metaphor of the mirror sustains the borders of inside and outside, suggesting that the outside appearance of skin reflects some stable inside identity of the subject. The use of visual metaphors does not indicate a “fusion of horizons” Taylor calls for but rather interpellates subjects in such a manner that their difference is constructed as an unchangeable kernel of their identity and is signified by their physical and epidermal appearance. These tropes of visuality that pervade Canadian multicultural interpellations of ethnic subjects affirm Taylor’s concept of recognition and construct racial, ethnic, and cultural difference as authentic, crystallized and permanent.

The spatial and visual renderings of inside and outside find thematic parallels in the intertextual moments of the novel, particularly in Daphne’s multiple acts of reading. When Daphne learns that her biological family name is ‘Eyre’ she begins reading Jane Eyre. There are a number of links between Jane and Daphne, both of whom are orphans searching for their true identity and both of whom engage in acts of forgiveness at the conclusion of their narratives. Yet

68 I am clearly sidestepping a Lacanian reading of this advertisement which, while potentially productive in terms of the manner in which the multicultural Canadian subject is produced, would be a detour from my central argument about the manner in which recognition, through its reliance on the visual register, crystallizes and produces an ‘inside’ of a subject’s identity and then claims to recognize that very authentic, inside identity.
Daphne is never able to fully integrate her own narrative with that of *Jane Eyre* and her reading of *Jane Eyre* is repeatedly interrupted by outside forces. For instance, when she opens the novel, she finds, “It’s a very strange sensation to inexperienced youth to feel itself quite alone in the world: cut adrift from every connection, uncertain whether the port to which it is bound can be reached, ...Well, looka who dat is here . . . yu tink she mind if we read about she? The bouncy accent of her mother invaded again. Daphne looked around, expecting a presence over her shoulder” (33 – 4; italics in original). Daphne’s reading of *Jane Eyre* is interrupted by a voice that she imagines to be her mother’s. This interruption of Daphne’s act of reading breaks down the division between inside and outside, text and world. The first-person narrative voice of *Jane Eyre* originates from within Jane’s own consciousness and this structural interiority is paralleled in Jane’s desire to protect the hallowed interiority of her identity. The intrusion of Daphne’s mother’s voice into Jane’s thoughts and Daphne’s reading disrupts these discrete positions of interiority and exteriority, suggesting that this interiority is not possible in *Out of My Skin*. Where *Jane Eyre*’s first-person narrative stresses a one-to-one relationship between Jane’s interiority and the text’s representation of her experience, *Out of My Skin* employs a third-person omniscient narrative voice which is at once inside and outside of Daphne’s subjectivity. *Jane Eyre* employs a synchronous narrative temporality that mirrors the development of Jane’s identity; on the contrary, analepsis and intertextuality contribute to a far less synchronous and to a denaturalized emergence of Daphne’s identity in *Out of My Skin*. Jane imagines herself “cut adrift from every connection,” further stressing the interiority of her narrative. Conversely, Daphne can’t escape the connections of her past as her thoughts are repeatedly interrupted by her mother’s voice, suggesting that even the interior space of her identity is permeated by the exterior world.
The difference between Daphne’s life and *Jane Eyre* is also evident in Daphne’s refusal to borrow a copy of *Jane Eyre* out of the library, instead always reading the novel within the library walls. While sitting in the library, Daphne enjoys the “cold air that blasted through the library with a vengeance, battling the humidity [outside] that threatened to curl pages” (34). The contrast between the “cool and quiet” library and the humid summer weather outside marks the difference between the neat, ordered, world of text and the complicated lives of Daphne, Surefoot and the other residents of Montreal. Daphne’s retreat into the “cool and quiet” world of the library can only offer temporary relief from the humid, political and antagonistic world outside her reading experience. The difference between the ordered, air-conditioned space of the library and the humid and noisy outside parallel the differences between the ordered world of authentic selves and the disordered identities of the novel. The mode of narrative interiority constructed in *Jane Eyre* parallels a true (in Taylor’s sense) interiority of the subject and *Out of My Skin*’s abandonment of that textual interiority indicates the manner in which subjects in the novel do not share such a privileged sense of interiority but are instead contending with more unsettling questions of belonging and identity.

If *Jane Eyre* is associated with the ordered space of the library, Gerald’s diary is linked with the humid, outside spaces of Montreal. Gerald’s diary supplements *Jane Eyre* in both content and form as it provides a detailed account of the madness of racism and a far more troubled narrative of a lack of identity. Taylor’s description of the “grevious wound” of “misrecognition” (226) is palpable in Gerald’s diaries because he feels that his society has misrecognized him as black. Gerald shares a number of similarities with Bertha Mason and his diaries give voice to the madness of race and colonialism which structure both of their identities. The categories of inside and outside that mediate *Jane Eyre* are broken down in Gerald’s diaries
to the extent that the alleged inner core of his identity is destroyed first by racism and then by electroshock treatment. The form of *Jane Eyre* posits narration as integral to the assertion of identity, while the form of Gerald’s diaries is often cryptic, temporally disjointed and sometimes completely incoherent, thus reflecting the madness of the racialized identity into which he has been forced. Unlike the temporal continuity that distinguishes Jane's Bildungsroman, Gerald’s diaries often skip days and he repeatedly feels as though he is losing his sense of time. Further, as Gerald’s identity is dissolved by the electroshock treatment, the form of his writing parallels the dissolution of his subjectivity. In a later entry, Gerald writes,

*October 16, 1959*

*She says: ‘Here now, Gerald, why so sad today?’*

*He says: nothing*

*She says: ‘We’ll have to get the doctor to come to talk to you; perhaps he can cheer you up a bit.’*

*He says: nothing*

*She says: Now look here, why don’t you come for a walk with me down to the common room and you can have a bit of tea with the others.’*

*He says: nothing* (105; italics in original)

In this passage Gerald depicts the slow erasure of his subjectivity in his refusal to identify himself by a name or to speak to the nurse. Both Daphne and Gerald respond with “nothing” to these acts of recognition suggesting that Daphne’s encounter with structures of recognition is akin to Gerald’s encounter with the madness of race. In Taylor’s terms, Gerald is recognized by his society as one-dimensionally black and Gerald’s silence in this passage marks his resistance to this recognition. Gerald's diaries trace the gradual dissolution of his identity while Jane's is stable,
discrete, and knowable. The narrative form of Out of My Skin seems to be caught between the two narrative modes, at once unable to follow the textual model of Jane Eyre and unwilling to completely surrender identity to dissolution. Despite being a record of her father's descent into madness, Gerald’s diaries also provide Daphne with an unexpected language for conceiving of identity beyond the logic of authenticity. Certainly the form of Out of My Skin mirrors this breaking down of categories of inside and outside as Daphne feels that the reality of Gerald’s diaries is leaking into her reality in Montreal and she begins to experience the same smells, sensations and feelings that she reads about in the diaries. Furthermore, while the diaries are initially separate from the main plot, the climax of that plot occurs when the Oka resistance reaches its conclusion and Daphne learns the truth behind her incestuous birth. At this point, the divisions between the main narrative and Gerald’s narrative dissolve and passages from Gerald’s diaries are interspersed with passages in Montreal. Both the form and the content of Out of My Skin trouble the relationships between the inside and the outside of both narrative and identity. The narrative’s dissolving of spatial, intertextual and formal representations of ‘inside’ indicate the text’s broader concern to deconstruct the inside of identity.

As Daphne reads Jane Eyre, she thinks “The words were like keys that gradually unshackled Jane from her predicament in a century uneasy with freedom” (33). Jane's words might operate like keys that unlock her identity and her freedom, but for Daphne and Gerald, words carry no such power, failing to unshackle them from their "predicament[s].” Yet this metaphor of the liberating power of language is not entirely appropriate to Daphne and Gerald for whom the only recourse to resist racism is often to say “Nothing.” The model of language employed in Out of My Skin is, I argue, found in the first passage of Gerald’s diary that Daphne reads: “Telephones, like gossamers, connect me to dead voices” (84; italics in original). After
reading this entry, Daphne thinks “Words were conspiring again . . . like fat hides bone . . . She tried to concentrate on the images, but they dissolved into the fine strands of the word gossamers, which kept surfacing in her mind” (84; italics in original). Gerald’s words work like gossamers, “conspiring” to connect Daphne to the dead voice of her Mother, Grandfather and her absented history in the black diaspora. Daphne’s Aunt, Sheila Eyre, tells her, as she gives Daphne her Grandfather’s diaries, to remember that “Some words hide truth just like fat hides bone” (82).

Daphne’s linking of the two statements from Gerald and Sheila indicates the connection between language, skin and heritage that pervades the novel. Furthermore, the image of gossamers, which are fine, cobweb-like strands that make imperceptible connections between things, provide a metaphor for the manner in which narrative and language connect Daphne to her history and for the networks of difference that structure Daphne’s identity. Gossamers undermine the logic of inside and outside, instead suggesting dispersed networks of connections of memory, narrative, history and politics. Gossamers are also an image for a more complicated, dispersed, and multiple conception of heritage. I argue that gossamers replace the logic of authenticity with a notion of identity in difference.

As Daphne stares at herself in a mirror, she thinks, “Her real mother had probably been part Chinese, part white, and part black. She touched her cheek and drifted in and out of the ingredient colours of her mother’s skin: yellow, white, black. Yellow, white, black – it reminded her of the game with the variable winner: scissors, stone, paper . . . her mind sticking on black, on paper, and wondering how it ever won” (15; italics in original). Daphne’s mother’s unknown origins and the swirling mix “of the ingredient colours of her mother’s skin” indicate the tenuous link between surface and core, skin and identity. Her identity shifts between the multiple threads of “Yellow, white, black.” Daphne’s focus on “black . . . and wondering how it ever won”
indicates her awareness that within this visual field of recognition and identity, black is the devalued term. Yet Daphne’s imagining of race as akin to a game indicates that she can alter its rules to make black win. The link between “black” and “paper” suggests the textuality of race and the body that informs the novel’s conception of identity. Rather than recognizing herself as authentically black, Daphne increasingly conceives of her identity and her body as transformable. Her transformation of her body employs the link between skin and identity to resist the logic of recognition. She undermines the idea of authentic blackness and instead treats blackness as malleable, expressing it within a discourse of resistance to racism.

The novel’s treatment of skin, colour, and physiognomy recodes the values that signify blackness as authentic essence. This is particularly evident in the visual representation of the black body. Daphne refuses the state injunction to “Take a look in the mirror” as she is aware of the manner in which visual representations of inside and outside promote a notion of authentic identity that misrecognizes her. The narrator explains that Daphne “kept few mirrors in the house – a casual, early morning encounter with a likeness of herself was startling. Shiny appliances were to be avoided whenever possible; she had painted her kettle red, her toaster matte white. Everything in her apartment had been dulled and muted, safe from reflection” (4). The mirror does not represent Daphne authentically but rather constructs her “likeness” within a particularly “startling” regime of visuality. Daphne’s distrust of mirrors reveals both her anxieties about her appearance and her awareness of the false premise of authenticity that imagines a tangible link between appearance and identity. In the same scene, Daphne does eventually confront her likeness in the mirror and she is described as

bracing herself momentarily at the door before confronting the mirror. The first thing that came into view was the nose: large, wide, and fleshy, nostrils asymmetrical, one an
imperfect oval, the other circular. Her grape-coloured lips were full and perfectly pleated—almost beautiful … Her skin was brown, not a permanent, wealthy tan, but rather copper-coloured in the summer and sickly olive by February. She was small-boned but had a bouncing, high-rumped gait. A trace of Africa. (4 – 5)

The asymmetry of Daphne’s nostrils suggests a parallel between her body and her own sense of her multiple origins. Also, the shifting tones of her “tan,” “copper,” and “brown” skin indicate that black is a misnomer. It is significant that the focalization of this passage shifts from Daphne to an unspecified, anonymous, third-party observer for whom “The first thing that came into view was the nose.” Does, then, the observation that Daphne’s body signifies “A trace of Africa” originate from Daphne, the narrator, or is this the implied reading of Daphne’s body from a third perspective? This shift in focalization indicates the manner in which the gaze always occupies the space of the Other.

The link between visuality and race continues throughout the text not only in the specific instances of recognition and visibility but also in the recurring themes of visibility and invisibility. Daphne attempts to resist this visual framing through what she calls her “Invisible trick” whereby she imagines herself as invisible at work and in public spaces. While her coworkers, Joanne and Daniel argue about the Oka resistance, Daphne tunes out the debate, with the narrator explaining that “It had happened again: the click – something hyper-aural – that always pulled Daphne out of events into a protected dreamspace … She would swirl above the day’s events as if in a dream” (40 – 1). Frustrated at Daphne’s behaviour, Joanne accuses her of walking “around the shop as if you’re in some kind of daze half the time. Like you float through concrete or something. Think we can’t see you? that you’re invisible? Is that it? Some black guy said that to me once; I told him he was full of shit” (197). Joanne insists that Daphne can be seen,
that her body is there and that she cannot disappear and “float through concrete.” Joanne’s question, posed from the perspective of a white, Canadian, invisible “we,” indicates the extent to which Joanne actually cannot see Daphne, as she has imagined her as different and outside the ‘we’ that Joanne claims to speak for. Joanne’s provocative question, “Think that we can’t see you? that you’re invisible?” is a real world invocation of the politics of recognition, demanding that the racialized subject appear as a consistent and known racial identity before the white gaze. Her recognition that it was a “black guy” who accused her of not seeing him confirms his accusation and makes explicit the racialized gaze of recognition. McKittrick’s unvisibility is palpable in these sections where Daphne’s invisibility is a response to the manner in which she is rendered (un)visible by Joanne’s gaze. Gerald refers to a similar type of invisibility in his diaries when he describes reading “a new book by an invisible man” (135; italics in original) which he later explicitly identifies as Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952). The reference to Ellison’s novel further links *Out of My Skin*’s concerns with race to representation, visibility and the white gaze.

Against this logic of recognition, authenticity and unvisibility, Daphne disrupts the visual reading of skin in order to transform and reframe the relationship between skin and identity. These transformations resist the logic of visuality as capable of revealing the authentic, inner identity of the subject and instead conceive of the body as text and as site. For instance, while working at the printing press *Copie Copie*, Daphne photocopies parts of her body in order to distort the representation of her body and skin. The narrator explains that “She tried her hand first, reducing it to 75% of the original. Then she put her finger on the glass and enlarged it to 150%. Next she bent over and stared into the light as the flash copied her nose onto the paper that

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69 The name of Daphne’s work place indicates the novel’s broad suspicion of cultural authenticity or claims of heritage.
shot out of the machine … She set the machine to 25% and again pressed her nose against the glass. It was this copy that she would pin up beside the bathroom mirror” (32). Daphne transforms the visual representation of her body, resizing and reframing the image such that her body signifies differently. This photocopying of her body is an act of anamorphosis, a visual transformation akin to metamorphosis that keeps the subject intact yet distorts the shape and form of that subject. Sylvia Söderlind describes anamorphosis as a form of visual representation marked by “a monstrous projection; or a representation of some image, either on a plane or curved surface, deformed and distorted; which at a certain distance shall appear regular and in proportion” (Margin/Alias 35). She argues that the “monstrosity alluded to in the definition points to its affinity with metamorphosis and the uncanny” and indeed Daphne’s recreation of this image of herself, distorted by the zooming function of the photocopier, disrupts the visual logic of authentic interiority by creating an uncanny representation of her body. Daphne’s act of anamorphosis undermines the link between a visual reading of the body and the recognition of an authentic identity. Indeed, photocopying the body has the effect of rendering racial characteristics unintelligible as the photocopier renders black and white bodies through a racially-ambivalent spectrum of grey. This reproduction recreates a “likeness” of her body that transforms both her perception of her body and the visual frame of recognition.70 Furthermore, placing this anamorphic representation of her body alongside the mirror juxtaposes the “monstrous projection” with the allegedly neutral image of the mirror such that the very frame of gazing is “deformed and distorted.” Daphne’s anamorphic representation shows how the gaze of

70 Again the Lacanian reading, while beyond the scope of this paper, would suggest that the act of recognition constructs the recognized subject through the field of vision as a unified and coherent identity very similar to Lacan’s conception of the function of the mirror stage in the formation of the ‘I’. Daphne’s act of anamorphosis indicates her disruption of this unity and the disjunctures and segmentations that comprise her subjectivity.
recognition is racially structured, particularly as it constructs black and racialized bodies as reflecting an inner core of essentialized racialized subjectivity. The anamorphic ‘distortions’ of her body present, in fact, a more accurate representation of her subjectivity. The anamorphic quality of Daphne’s image is also evident in the photographs of Surefoot that Daphne stumbles upon in an adoption clinic: “Skin. Photographs of skin upon skin. Glossy, pocked-grey close-ups of an arm, a leg, a torso, all of which had been scarred from burning or tearing” (12). The surfaces of the photographs and the skin itself reinforce the structures of inside and outside that recognition depends upon. Yet the close-ups of the burnt, torn and scarred skin render these images a “monstrous projection” that undermines the connection between skin and identity. Indeed, the image of Surefoot’s torn and cut skin suggests the presence of depth and something buried beneath the surface that is concealed by skin.

In place of this visual logic of recognition, the narrative repeatedly disrupts the metonymic link between skin and identity and conceives of identity and body in different terms. As the narrative progresses, it tends towards representing the body in spatial, rather than visual, terms. Like gossamers which contain multiple points of connection, the spatiality and depth of the body conceives of the body as a site of multiple connections, influences, fragments, and difference. The visual emphasis on the skin reifies heritage, while the spatial imagination of the body shows multiple points of connection, difference and disjuncture with that heritage. This is evident in a passage of the novel where Daphne attends a protest in support of the Mohawk warriors at Oka and sees Surefoot on the other side of the police barricades:

She saw the corpulence of Surefoot … Surefoot’s round, jiggling face was tempered and sober, yet something undermined authority. Something cracked the certainty. Her body rooted and abundant, seemed at the same time ready to cleave. Something subterranean,
existing in the infinite memory of the granite, in the cleft between vegetable and rock, seeped from her. … Her whole elbow, Daphne noticed, was a scab … Far away in her thoughts, Surefoot raised her hand to the scab on the elbow. The injury was many days old and the crust that had formed over the wound was dry and dark brown. She began to pick away at the scab. A few small pieces flew off into the air. Then she ... calmly, purposefully, tore off the dried blood and skin until the scab was gone; underneath the revealed pink flesh, blood welled up to pour again. Each fragment of old skin was tossed onto the pavement of the bridge. (148 – 9)

Daphne’s observation of “the corpulence of Surefoot” along with Surefoot’s tossing of “old skin ... onto the pavement of the bridge” links Surefoot’s body and her identity with the land itself. Surefoot’s picking at her scab suggests that while she yearns to shed her skin and the trauma of her childhood, her old wounds “welled up to pour again.” Surefoot’s continuous wounding recalls Taylor’s “grevious wound” (226) of misrecognition, but also the wounding that occurs in the act of recognition, particularly in the link between skin and identity. Like Gerald, Surefoot wants to escape her skin and transform her identity. Yet her placing of her skin in the land repeatedly reopens the wound of her identity and heritage. This repeatedly swelling scab suggests that this wound is part of that belonging. This reference to “Something [that] cracked the certainty” recalls Daphne’s own experience of her lack of identity as a kind of “falling between cracks” and is also present in Daphne’s observation that while Surefoot’s body is “rooted and abundant” it also “seemed at the same time ready to cleave.” Daphne’s observation of Surefoot reimagines the relation between surface and depth.

This shift from the depiction of the skin as the surface of authentic identity to a conception of the body as containing depth, layers and fissures indicates the multiple gaps.
of conflict and fragments that make up Daphne’s, Gerald’s and Surefoot’s identity. Their heritage is one of absence, scarring, wounding, and loss and the text’s shift to spatial representations of the body tries to reveal this “subterranean” absence, the moment when identity seems “about to cleave.” The spatial conception of the body offers a genealogy of identity, indicating the multiple connections and breakages that compose the subject in surprising and unexpected ways. In a sense, this move in the text from a surface understanding of the body to a metaphor of depth offers, in Foucault’s terms, a genealogy of identity and heritage. Foucault, in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” (1977) uses the same metaphors of depth, archaeology, tectonics and fissures that *Out of My Skin* does in order to articulate his concept of genealogy. Foucault’s genealogical project “opposes itself to the search for ‘origins’” and “rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies” (77). Genealogy shows that “What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity” (79). This description of the genealogical disavowal of origins reads like a summation of the conclusion of *Out of My Skin* and I propose that Daphne’s abandoning of her desire for her own “inviolable identity” along with the text’s turn towards metaphors of depth, spatialization, and archaeology all indicate the text’s project to show not an “inviolable identity” of blackness or nation but rather the “dissension of other things,” the “subterranean” “cleav[ing]” and “disparity” between national and individual identity. Contrary to the discourse of recognition that reads the surface of the skin as an “ideal signification” of race, identity and national belonging, the spatial and depth metaphors of the body instead indicate the genealogical emergence of the subject made up of multiple, fragmentary sources. Indeed, *Out of My Skin* all but explicitly indicates its move towards a genealogical conception of identity and
heritage when, in a conversation with Michel where he asks about her family, Daphne thinks, “Michel was direct, digging with an archaeological skill she was unable to sidestep” (89).

These spatial metaphors of the body increase as the novel progresses, challenging authentic identity and the visual regime of recognition. This shift from visual to spatial metaphors of the body and identity is present in Gerald’s diaries in which he writes about his childhood relationship with a boy named Manny. He and Manny play a game called “High man and Low Man” in which the Low Man masturbates the High Man and then they “bathe in the pool and before drying off would roll our entire bodies in the red brown mud we dug from the side of the pool. The sun dried it into an armour of mud and we couldn’t smile or scratch without it cracking and falling off” (108; italics in original). The “armour of mud” that Gerald and Manny cake onto their bodies signifies an outer skin and thematizes their desire to conceal and dance out of their skin. This application of mud and the pleasure Gerald and Manny take in covering their bodies in the drying mud indicates the desire not only to conceal the skin but also to perform a kind of corporeal transformation. The physical immobility that they experience in their transformation recalls Clarke’s and Fanon’s articulation of the psychic immobilities of race. Further, the application of mud to the skin performs the kinds of epidermal and racial transformation that Gerald desires. Conceiving of his body as layered and containing depth allows him to imagine his skin as something he can shed in the hope that the whiteness beneath will be revealed. Later in his diaries, Gerald writes that “These nurses are making my bowels back up. ... This morning my guts exploded into the toilet on their way to hell ... It’s the last of the blackness, the last of the stifling servitude. ... I am a white man” (130; italics in original). Gerald regularly insists that he is a white man and his multiple references to shedding skin, masking his skin, and evacuating his body of some inner blackness indicates his own struggle against the madness of race. Gerald’s
spatialization of his body is a gesture of transformation that reveals his desire to shed his blackness and be thus liberated from the madness of the racial-epidermal schema.

Daphne sees, in Gerald’s diaries, both the tragedy of his succumbing to the Manichean logic of race and a sense of hope and possibility in his desire to dance out of his skin. Daphne attempts to honour Gerald’s desire for transformation with her own act of transformation in the shower:

Rubbing hard on her arms, legs, and face, she showered under a cold spray, trying to peel off a layer of something that had begun to grow on her. Real and imagined smells. ... She reached back into his words, just barely able to imagine the regular throbbing and then, nothing . . . the treatment and the slow and deliberate eradication of memory. The annihilation of personality. After a few minutes she felt drowned under the obliterating spray. She was tempted to stay there, to disappear inside the crack that had opened wider, but she forced her hand to the tap and turned it off, just barely able to catch her breath ...

Lying on the rim of the tub was a cosmetic facial mask – a green gel, glutinous and cohesive – which she squeezed from its container onto her fingers and spread over her face. It started to dry immediately, pulling the skin of her nose tighter to her cheek, her chin tighter to her neck. It dried into a plastic mould. ... staring into the mirror at the shining, impermeable face. Peeling off the mask, she felt the tingling of opened pores underneath, and the green sheath, this second skin, came off in one long unconnected layer – a reptilian moulting. (127 – 8)

Gerald’s words physically affect Daphne as she imagines his narrative in the form of “a layer of something that had begun to grow on her.” Gerald’s words mark a connection between their lives such that the obliterating spray of the shower water is akin to the obliteration of Gerald’s memory.
and identity in the electroshock treatment. Daphne finds "the annihilation of personality" that Gerald experiences as a result of electroshock therapy desirable because it connotes the “eradication of memory” and of her troubled heritage. Yet in place of “annihilation” or “eradication” of her past or heritage, Daphne instead repeats Gerald’s gesture of transformation in her application of the facial mask, an act which recalls Gerald’s armour of mud. Daphne’s recreation of this shedding of her mask is described as a “reptilian moulting” and this image of the lizard’s transformation is one that Gerald alludes to multiple times in his diary. Daphne, like Gerald, aims to transform her body through this kind of “reptilian moulting” which makes her skin signify something other than the authentic identity of recognition. Surefoot’s scab, Gerald’s armour of mud and Daphne’s facial mask are all acts of “reptilian moulting” that aim to transform the signification of skin and articulate their identities outside the logic of recognition and the madness of race. Unlike the stable correspondence between skin and authenticity that the politics of recognition promotes, Surefoot’s, Daphne’s and Gerald’s acts of “reptilian moulting” embrace metamorphosis as the principle of their existence.

Daphne repeats Gerald’s action to dance out of her skin in an act of liberation. Gerald, however, sought to do so to discover the whiteness beneath, ironically imprisoning himself in the lure of skin. Towards the end of the novel, the narrator describes how Daphne returns to *Copie* with one of Gerald’s diaries and transforms the meaning of her skin, her identity and her heritage by marking herself with Gerald’s words. Daphne,

took the diaries out of her bag and looked through them, searching for the right page.

Finally she found the word, just a single word in Gerald’s scrawl. She adjusted the size button to 150% and placed the journal on the glass. The handwriting shot out enlarged.

She cut the word out, placed it back on the glass, blew it up again. Finally,
CHAMELEON shot out of the machine, almost the size of the thing itself. She took the scissors and cut around it in the shape of a lizard. Then with some clear tape she fastened it to her triceps. Patting it and smoothing it down, she was content with her new tattoo.

(179)
The phrase that Daphne photocopies from Gerald’s diary reads “I, chameleon, now belong” (111; italics in original). That she selects the word “CHAMELEON” from the sentence indicates that moulting rather than belonging animates the “I” that she becomes rather than is. More importantly, Daphne’s taping of the word to her triceps makes her skin signify transformation, rebirth and moulting rather than racial authenticity, foreign heritage or a stable identity. Daphne’s tattoo explicitly marks her body with the desire to transform herself and to make her body signify not some authentic identity or some biological certainty of belonging but rather transformation itself. Daphne makes her body signify in a manner that undermines recognition and the disabling aspects of blackening, insisting that she be recognized by others as not one thing but as multiple, shifting identities. Daphne explains that she, Surefoot and Gerald are “creatures that made sense only in the imagination” (148) and her tattoo signifies that act of imagination and re-invention. Daphne’s tattoo thus undermines any organic unity or link between skin and identity.

Furthermore, her tattoo is an appropriation of Gerald’s words in the interests of preserving and honouring some element of her Grandfather’s struggle against racism. Her anamorphic transformation of Gerald’s “scrawl” makes her heritage signify something other than loss, trauma and absence.

At the end of the novel, Daphne attempts to affirm this new conception of her identity as one not grounded in a sense of belonging but rather as one that has “to be invented.” Daphne’s final act of self-construction at the end of the text occurs when she travels out of the city and into
northern Canada. While up north, she retreats into the bush where her epiphany occurs concerning her self-constituted identity, her absent heritage, her desire to find a place in her biological family and with what she must do to lay her history to rest. Reflecting on the lives of Surefoot, her mother and Gerald, she declares,

All of the others ... had disobeyed the inevitable, had tried to reverse the current of their circumstances. Her mother had walked into the water to cleanse shame and had never walked out, but perhaps there she’d found the mercy she’d needed. Even in jail, Surefoot would continue her conversation with the pine trees, and belonging would drip from her like blood from a pierced palm. Then there was Gerald . . . he had been alive enough to reinvent himself. She wanted to preserve this act of his, this triumph of the will in the pit of insanity, and it was then that she knew what to do with the diaries. A bow to memory. To let the snow and rain work on them until they became a place in which her own body could eventually be laid to rest. To have paper petrify and fill the cleft between vegetable and rock, the words silent and grinning in the earth. (202)

Here Daphne testifies to the manner in which her mother, Surefoot and Gerald all struggle with identity and with the disabling logic of recognition and race. Daphne’s mother surrendered to her shame by drowning herself and Surefoot constructs her own sense of belonging out of her ongoing wounding. Yet Daphne aligns herself with Gerald whose desire to “reinvent himself” is read as his “triumph of the will in the pit of insanity” (202). As part of her desire to “preserve this act” she buries his diaries in the Canadian wilderness. The description of Gerald’s diaries ”silent and grinning in the earth,” while evoking skeletal remains, also communicates that she is at peace with her destructive past. The word ”grinning” is both happy and sinister, in keeping with the tough reconciliation Daphne achieves. Also, her description of the paper which will “fill the cleft
between vegetable and rock” is a return to the spatial and archaeological metaphors of the text where her “bow to memory” in burying the diaries can fill the crack that pervades Daphne’s identity and create a “place in which her own body could … be laid to rest.” Daphne’s act of burial transforms both memory and space, inserting Gerald’s memories into the land, thus rendering his words “silent.” Daphne’s burial of Gerald’s diary marks her desire to bury her history, engage in a “bow to memory” and plant a “seed of forgiveness” (203). She creatively converts the violence of her birth, the absences of her heritage and her Grandfather’s tragedy into a “seed of forgiveness.” This act of burial is not a repression or disavowal of her history but rather an embrace of her past in all its ugliness.

Daphne’s burial of the diaries places Gerald’s history and the history of colonialism and the black diaspora within Canada and thus insists that Daphne’s heritage is part of Canada’s multicultural heritage. Daphne’s act of burial does not disavow family, origins, or heritage but instead insists that Gerald’s trauma and Daphne’s absented heritage are part of the “multicultural heritage of Canadians.” Thus, Daphne does not wholly disavow the language of Canadian multiculturalism but rather rewrites these categories of belonging, heritage and recognition on her own terms. Sharon Morgan Beckford argues that black Canadian women writers “must of necessity come to terms with the language of the land” (479) in order to “remap the land in their own terms and reinscribe images of themselves into the Canadian geographical imagination in which they are often rendered invisible” (465). Daphne does come to terms with the language of the land, particularly the language of heritage and recognition, by insisting that Canada recognize her own history as part of its national heritage. It is through the process of rewriting the land that Daphne is able to transform her identity and heritage in terms of her own choosing. The spatial metaphors of the body and land indicate Out of My Skin’s turn towards a genealogy of identity,
history and nation. Placing Gerald’s diaries deep within the land, in “the cleft between vegetable and rock” employs metaphors of depth to place Gerald’s diaries within Canada itself. Further, the text suggests that burying the diaries will fill in Daphne’s “gaping hole in reality” and her feeling of “falling between cracks … stepping and missing” (2) that has pervaded her life. Yet, in another sense, Gerald’s diaries are not buried and forgotten, but are layered, palimpsestically, into the land, thus becoming part of the tectonic core of the nation. In this sense the act of burial rewrites Canadian heritage as a palimpsest, suggesting that Gerald’s diaries are part of this genealogy of Canadian heritage. Indeed, the cover of the novel shows an image of Montreal as palimpsest where Gerald’s writing is inscribed on the city alongside an image of a manta ray (Gerald repeatedly imagines himself as a manta ray as it is a “fish that should have been a bird” (192)). I argue that Daphne’s burial of the diaries constitutes a remapping of land and nation from a black diasporic perspective by layering Gerald’s narratives and memories into the “language of the land” (479) itself. She insists that the language of recognition and heritage must go further and recognize Gerald, colonialism, slavery and the Middle Passage as part of this Canadian heritage. Her burial of the diaries inserts Gerald’s narrative and the narratives of the black diaspora into the genealogy of Canada itself.

It is after this final act of burial that Daphne emerges from the wilderness and hitchhikes “home” to Montreal. The novel concludes with the narrator describing how Michel “caught sight of Daphne, who held his gaze for the first time. She walked toward him, the sentence forming easily, spontaneously, as she pursed her flush lips. In a small but firm voice she uttered two brittle words. ‘I’m here.’ Slender words, but sharp as a deep cut exposing bone” (208). Daphne’s articulation of her presence indicates the manner in which she has, through her acts of reading, interpretation and transformation, been able to articulate an identity of her own and create a place
for herself in Canada. That she is able to hold Michel’s gaze for the first time suggests that she has undermined the gaze of recognition. "I’m here” no longer hides from the truth of her violated past or yearns for the world on the other side of the window pane. Instead, Daphne’s reconciled self is both brittle and sharp and, finally, recognizable to herself.

Identity in *Out of My Skin* is uncertain, inauthentic, and unvisible, and defined through difference. The novel rejects skin as the privileged signifier of authenticity. Daphne’s discovery that she is the incestuous offspring of her grandfather and his daughter undermines the "fantasy of unity" proposed by the nation-as-family metaphor. Furthermore, the text’s depictions of the Oka resistance and the struggle of Francophone Canadians to find a place in the nation links this undermining of the fantasy of family unity to a similar undermining of homogeneous national unity and national heritage. Thus diasporic memories, in the form of Gerald’s diaries, blacken the nation, rewriting the meaning of national heritage. The structures of recognition cannot account for characters like Daphne, Surefoot and Gerald whose existence makes “sense only in the imagination.” In place of the surface readings of skin as a metonymic link between identity and corporeality, the narrative conceives of identity genealogically and Daphne struggles to make her body signify in the manner of her choosing. *Out of My Skin* deploys the decentred and genealogical metaphor of gossamers to define identity in and through difference, transformation, and dissension.

Daphne’s final statement of identity, “I’m here,” seems to mark a difference between the conclusion of *Out of My Skin* and the conclusion of the other texts considered in this study. It seems impossible to imagine any of the characters from Brand’s or Clarke’s oeuvre making such an uncompromising statement of presence and identity in Canada. Brand describes Alan as a “slender lacuna” (II) and depicts the absented-presence of the Door of No Return as pervading
black diasporic life. The figures in her poetry are never completely “here;” their “here” is always structured and inflected by other places and times. Similarly, Clarke depicts his characters “sliding,” “shifting,” and “uncontrollable,” thus undermining their stable presence in Canada with feelings of corporeal mobility and psychic immobility. The image, at the start of The Origin of Waves, of Tim and John emerging from the blizzard and recalling the events of their lives evokes Cho’s conception of diasporic subjectivity as “a complex process of memory and emergence.”

The importance of memory is given further weight in Idora’s and Brand’s memories of Albert Johnson as they oppose the erasure of Johnson’s presence from the Canadian historical record. Similarly, the actual killing of Albert Johnson and the public discourse concerning his death show that this sense of abjection is not merely affective or imagined but real. Brand’s and Clarke’s texts and their rewriting of Albert Johnson’s history repeatedly depict black people abjected from the nation and their double-consciousness emerges from this absented presence, unvisibility and abjection of blackness from Canada. I have argued that the narration of memory in each of their texts is a critical site of their double-consciousness as the characters transform their memories of loss and absence of origins into an expression of a different kind of presence in the nation. As such, perhaps Daphne’s final statement “I’m here” marks a difference between this repeated abjection of black people from Canada, or a doubly-conscious presence of black people in the nation and a hopeful gesture that black people can now announce themselves “here,” within the nation. Indeed, Daphne’s statement of presence reads like a response to Frye’s (in)famous question, ”Where is here” (220)? For Daphne, as Frye knew, enunciation is an effect of (dis)location.

Daphne’s expression of identity is also inflected by a sense of wounding as the narrator describes her statement as composed of “Slender words, but sharp as a deep cut exposing bone”
I argue that Daphne’s statement retains the doubleness and vigilance of double-consciousness by coupling her presence in the nation alongside the “deep cut” and wounding that comes with her proclamation of identity. McWatt’s critique of recognition insists that the wound of identity, the lost memories and absented histories of diasporic life, must be kept in view in this expression of presence within Canada. She keeps these losses in view with her turn to spatial and genealogical metaphors by which the losses and wounds of Daphne’s identity are not buried but transformed into an integral parts of Daphne’s identity. Furthermore, I argue that McWatt does not turn away from the language of double-consciousness but rather the conclusion of the novel shows that recognition must function doubly, at once recognizing diasporic subjects’ presence and identity, the “way of being human that is” their way, and this doubleness of diasporic life, the pain of hyphenation and the wound of an identity composed out of absence, forgotten histories and inexpressible losses. The narrator’s description of the “deep cut exposing bone” evokes this doubleness of recognition where Daphne’s assertion of her identity and her place in the nation are expressed alongside the wound of her irrecoverable origins. Skin gives way to the depth of the cut and the layers of bone in a way that makes visible how Daphne remains “torn asunder” and her exhibition of the fragmentary and painful tearing reconceives of that tearing as part of her assertion of belonging. As such, Daphne’s final statement of identity does not signal a resolution of double-consciousness in Canada, a reconciling of blackness with nation such that the historical and contemporary abjections of black people from Canada are finally resolved. Instead, McWatt continues the project of blackening that each of these authors undertakes, transforming the abjection of black people from Canada into an inscription of the doubleness of black diasporic life in Canada. McWatt imagines this doubleness as the wound of identity, a dual exhibition of absented-presence, an expression of identity and belonging that is “torn by the ambivalence of
mourning losses that are both your own and yet not quite your own” (Cho 21). Daphne is able to declare her presence, but like Gerald and Surefoot, her identity is marked by and indeed emerges from a sense of mourning, loss and absence. While Daphne may be able to dance out of her skin, the wounding of race and the loss of her origins remain critical elements of her identity. *Out of My Skin* heals the wounds of misrecognition, but insists that the wounds that others in the national fabric bear and survive grant them dignity.
Chapter 6: Concluding

I have attempted to bring together the multiple gossamer threads of McWatt’s novel and demonstrate how her text reinvigorates Canadian multiculturalism and the blackening of Canada by uniquely writing black diasporic life within the terms of Canadian multiculturalism. *Out of My Skin* is concerned with the absences of diasporic history, the relationship between memory and history, Canada’s buried colonial past and the way in which that history continues to affect contemporary notions of race, recognition and belonging. Each of these narrative threads is linked to the representation of skin as it justifies the abjection of Gerald and Daphne from their respective societies. The threads of connection between Gerald’s explicitly racist society and Daphne’s subtly and invisibly racist society rewrite notions of Canadian heritage and identity to include colonialism, slavery and the Middle Passage. The connecting threads between colonial Guyana and multicultural Montreal do not merely indicate similarities between the two spaces but remap Montreal and Canada in order to bow to the memory not only of Gerald and his kin, but to the stigmata of Surefoot’s pierced palm, bleeding belonging. McWatt’s project, to superimpose the metaphors, images, histories, memories and struggles of the black diaspora onto Canada, has been a constant theme of this study. Brand, Clarke and McWatt show how the histories of slavery and the Middle Passage inflect notions of race and citizenship in Canada. As I have argued, the narration of memory is one of the critical ways in which these authors locate the absences and histories of the black diaspora within Canada. McWatt adds to this project with her complicated depiction of history as genealogy and diasporic memory and heritage as dispossession. Together, these three authors comprise a chorus of voices that engage in a blackening of Canada by writing
the continuities between the memories and histories of the black diaspora and contemporary Canada. The metaphor of gossamers, then, is appropriate to this project and to black diasporic writing in Canada more generally. Gossamers provide a spatial metaphor for the disparate locations and connections that pervade these texts and for the crossing and hybridizing of forms that these authors practise. Furthermore, gossamers offer a metaphor for the multiple terms that each of these authors generates in their lexicon of diasporic life in Canada. The numerous geographies, routes, histories, identities, languages, idioms, desires, memories and dreams of this field of writing all link together in surprising and often barely-detectable ways as part of a broader project of blackening Canada.

In *Out of My Skin* Daphne pulls together the multiple threads of gossamers through her acts of memory, reading, and interpretation. Indeed, the novel’s critique of recognition and assertion of black diasporic identity in Canada are always mediated through Daphne’s multiple acts of reading that bring together the narratives of *Jane Eyre*, Gerald’s diaries, the public discourse concerning Oka, the Mohawk communiqués, political pamphlets, and the discourses of identity and nation themselves. I have argued that Brand’s and Clarke’s narrations of blackening are concerned with transforming the memories and losses of the black diaspora into a different kind of assertion of identity that employs the double-consciousness of the diaspora as a means of blackening the nation. Brand’s observation of the Door of No Return in quotidian life and Clarke’s use of memory to undermine psychic immobility do not merely express the absent histories and lost origins that form the substrate of black diasporic life. I argue that their depiction of memory transforms that absence into a critique of origins and structures of belonging. The memory of loss enables a doubleness that undermines national and individual identities revealing Bhabha’s “minus in the origin” of national identity and Canadian multiculturalism. This project
continues in their narrative recollection of Albert Johnson where the narration of memory stands in opposition to historical erasure and transforms historical narratives of black silence, abjection and death into a blackening of the nation. Johnson is not merely remembered but Brand’s and Clarke’s emplotment of their characters’ (and their own) memories of Johnson rewrite his death and make it signify something other than absence, loss and trauma. Idora’s preservation of the newspaper article depicting Johnson’s death is an act of archival research that she creatively reshapes through her memory. Idora mis-remembers the details of Johnson’s life and death in a manner that renders them relevant to her own life in Canada and transforms his individual trauma into a narrative of collective black life in Canada. Similarly, Brand recasts Johnson’s death through the memories of her speaker, Chloe, and Julia. These narrative acts of re-membering dispute the erasure of black histories, smearing the nation rather than blackness.

*Out of My Skin* further complicates the importance of the narration of memory to the project of blackening Canada. Daphne has no memory of her biological familial origins or heritage and this heritage of absence leads to her repeated feeling that she is “Nothing.” Indeed, as in these other texts, Daphne repeatedly returns to the memories of her childhood to understand her feeling of nothingness but finds no comfort in memories of a life that do not seem to fit her. Gerald’s diaries seem to offer Daphne the refuge of origins, but reading them brings her no closer to the truth. Rather, she finds that the truth of her origins and the violence of her heritage are more immobilizing and debilitating than the absence of those origins. Confronted with the prospect of recovering what seemed irrecoverable and learning the ‘truth’ of her lost origins, Daphne learns that the facts of her origins and heritage render her “Nothing” even more than their absence ever did. Daphne thus transforms Gerald’s diaries, and her own origins, by burying Gerald’s diaries in Canada. Her "bow to memory" signals the shift from her role as interpreter to
that of the author of her own tale, allowing her to transform Gerald’s memories and her own memory of absence, loss and trauma into an expression of her presence beyond the logic of origins, heritage or belonging. Daphne’s bow to memory writes Gerald’s narrative palimpsestically onto the nation in a way that transforms the meaning of her absented origins in the diaspora and her current place in Canada. Foucault explains that “Genealogy … operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched and recopied many times” (76); this conception of genealogy makes her anamorphic image of herself, her chameleon tattoo, and Gerald's buried diaries that are also her buried selves, the grounds rather than the distortions or lack of her being.

Each of the authors in this study narrates the painful memories of the diaspora in a manner that signifies something other than black abjection, silence and trauma. As with Daphne’s doubly inflected statement of presence, these authors at once long to redress black abjection from Canada while also keeping the absences of memory and the irrecoverability of origins in view as part of their critique of nation as a stable form of belonging. The struggle to blacken Canada is, for each of these authors, a struggle to transform absences and aporias into an openness of identity and form that can critique and transform the nation by locating the themes, motifs, and metaphors of the black diaspora in Canada. Brand’s remembering of Albert Johnson, for instance, attempts to remember Johnson in a manner “that wasn’t somehow immaculate with his disaster” (thirsty IX). I argue that one of the critical sites of blackening for McWatt, Brand and Clarke are the acts of reading and writing and narration that their characters engage in, particularly as these creative acts open a space of black expression in the nation and mediate diasporic memory and identity. As Imre Szeman notes, “every interpretation or reading is a kind of translation mechanism” and these texts at once employ reading as a kind of translation while also insisting
“that it is best to acknowledge rather than to hide the workings of” (812) that translation. The acts of narration in each of these texts translate the black diaspora into Canada and thus show how the “complex process of memory and emergence” renders Canada diasporic. Daphne’s multiple acts of reading, writing and translation translate the gossamer threads of her identity into a common “language of the land.” The acts of reading and narration in each of these texts are linked to the struggle to remember one’s past even when that past is forgotten, absent or erased. If, as Szeman suggests, “it is best to acknowledge rather than hide the workings of” these acts of translation, then these texts at once attempt to translate the absented origins of black diasporic life into Canada while keeping the wound of that absence visible. As such, the doubleness of double-consciousness reframes this “complex process of memory and emergence” in a way that renders palpable the absences and losses of the past while also translating that absence into a different kind of presence in Canada.

Each author’s attention to narrative, reading and writing insists that theories of black diasporic subjectivity cannot be isolated from these acts of narration. These narratives do not simply illustrate or embody theories of black diasporic subjectivity but rather are a form of blackening unto themselves. It is through Brand’s acts of narration that she is able to render palpable that which is invisible or unspeakable within Walcott’s framework of blackening. The yearnings, longings, gestures and inflections of diasporic life are made visible in Brand’s fictive and critical narratives. Furthermore, it is through her acts of narration that the “romance with the past tense” (XX) that she observes in diasporic life is rewritten as a hopeful, enabling form of betweenness and doubleness. Indeed, the repetitions that Brand observes in the diaspora are rewritten in her poetry such that they exhibit a kind of grace and a longing for something to come
rather than for something to return. Her poetry thus interrupts national temporality with diasporic becoming.

Austin Clarke’s texts are equally concerned with narrative as a form of blackening and his characters employ narrative to make sense of their acts of migration and movement. Clarke’s narratives do not merely offer instances of Fanon’s depiction of psychic immobility but rather show how the narration of that immobility constitutes a form of psychic mobility unto itself. Tim, John, Idora and Mary-Mathilda all narrate the events of their lives to both understand their diasporic movement and to render the absent histories and psychic immobilities of the diaspora less disabling and immobilizing. In addition to these explicit acts of narration, Clarke’s texts repeatedly employ multiple frame narratives that foreground the act of telling a story and in which the person hearing the story describes being transported through the act of storytelling. As Percy, for instance, listens to Mary-Mathilda’s narrative, the narrator describes how “He has been travelling along with her story of personal history, over that landscape, observing the chapters of the journey” (276), and he thinks of Mary-Mathilda’s narrative as a kind of “Travelling over life, and over land” (324). Clarke depicts narrative as a form of mobility that undercuts the psychic immobility of race, slavery and colonialism. Furthermore, narrative in Clarke’s works remaps national space as diasporic and unfamiliar. As Mary-Mathilda gives her statement to Percy and they walk in the dungeons beneath the plantation house, the narrator observes, “The story that duplicates this strange underground journey Sargeant is being made to take causes him to feel he is a foreigner, a stranger in a land in which he thought he had a straight course, but which he now knows is winding, if not circuitous; something like the alienation, the hopelessness and the invisibility Manny told him he felt, when he lived in Georgia and in Florida and in Philadelphia” (342). Percy’s feeling of being a foreigner and a stranger in his own country reveals how Mary-
Mathilda’s narrative has estranged him from a once familiar place. The language of “hopelessness and ... invisibility” recalls the feelings of invisibility that pervade More, The Origin of Waves and “Sometimes, A Motherless Child” suggesting how narrative identifies and transforms these forms of social invisibility through a different inscription of place. Percy originally sets himself on a “straight course” but Mary-Mathilda alters his sense of place such that he now feels “something like ... alienation.” For Clarke, the story is itself the "winding, if not circuitous route" that his characters travel. Tim observes a similar connection between narrative, mobility and blackening when John reacts to his story “as if he himself is going through the exertion of the narrative, as if he himself has endured the details of my journey over the landscape of the story” (85). Tim and John’s narratives not only rewrite the meaning of Canada but also resist the social and psychic immobility to which they are otherwise confined. Similarly, while Idora’s narration of her life does not undo her social immobility it does constitute a kind of psychic mobility and a blackening of Canada. Clarke’s texts demonstrate how the acts of migration, displacement and “crossing” are acts of imagination and the felt effects of immobility, unvisibility and outright racism are tempered through these diasporic narratives. These narratives are one means of resisting this enforced immobility, allaying the contradictions of migration and transnational existence and rendering Canada diasporic through a blackening of the nation.

Brand’s, Clarke’s, and McWatt’s narratives do not merely describe the conditions of being black in Canada but transform those conditions from one of absence to an assertion of the doubleness of black diasporic identity. The absent memories, heritage and origins of diasporic life depicted in Brand’s, Clarke’s and McWatt’s texts are transformed through these acts of narration. Mary-Mathilda explains “all that we possess to hand-down is love. And bitterness. And blood. And anger. And all four, wrap-up in one narrative” (354). Narrative does not replace or fill in the
absented origins and memories of black diasporic life but transforms those absences into something other than black silence and abjection from Canada. It is through a narration of diasporic absence and the continued felt effects of that absence that these authors are able to depict blackness in Canada as an identity formed out of that absence. It is this narration of black identity in Canada as at once present and paradoxically attuned to the presence of absence that constitutes the double-consciousness of these narratives. Gerald’s narrative is his only means of writing against the madness of racism and his narrative of love, bitterness, blood, and anger is Daphne’s troubled inheritance. Daphne transforms Gerald’s narrative from signifying origins as absence and trauma to offering a different expression of blackness. It is through her re-narration of Gerald’s narratives, her acts of anamorphosis and her palimpsestic layering of Gerald’s diaries within Canada that Daphne is able to transform her heritage and engage in a blackening of Canada. Blackening is not merely expressed in these narratives but is a kind of narrative which intervenes in the narration of nation and thus remaps the “language of the land” (479) such that black people can “remap the land in their own terms and reinscribe images of themselves into the Canadian geographical imagination in which they are often rendered invisible” (465).

I argue that the project of blackening and of inscribing diasporic double-consciousness within the nation is particularly suited to Canada where the presence of “multicultural heritage” and the lack of stable national origins, homogeneous identity, one national language or a definitive national historical genesis leaves opens the conditions of possibility for intervening in the narration of nation. The narrative of Canada is particularly open to transformation and reinterpretation and these authors seize upon that openness to offer a deeper language of difference and multiculturalism within Canada. Numerous Canadians are, in Jonathan Kertzer’s words, engaging in a practise of Worrying the Nation (1998) whereby the lack of a stable
Canadian identity or history leaves them worried that “The object of theoretical inquiry in
Canadian literary studies – Canada – no longer functions as it once did” (3). The worry that things
aren’t what they used to be is seemingly as old a worry as Canadian writing itself. As I discussed
at the outset of this project, the endless cycle of crises concerning multiculturalism, race, and
immigration, signals, perhaps, the end of a stable narrative of Canada if one ever existed. Indeed,
George Grant’s Lament for a Nation (1965) at once explicitly signalled the end of an influential
Canadian narration of nation but also implicitly ushered in a new narrative of national
lamentation of lost origins and forgotten national memories. What is for some a source of worry,
over this reduction of the Canadian nation, is, for others, cause for celebration and a sign of
Canada’s timeliness as the first post-national nation (Davey 1993). Davey’s Post-National
Arguments (1983) celebrates the post-centennial Canadian texts that announce “the arrival of the
post-national state” and “suggest a world and a nation in which social structures no longer link
regions or communities” (266). Sylvia Söderlind critiques this celebration of Canadian post-
nationalism as a “‘Canada first’ movement” (“Ghost-National” 675), which “emphasizes the
perpetual ‘newness’ of Canada” (690) and repeatedly shows how Canada was always-already
post-national, post-colonial, transnational and diasporic. Söderlind shows how these critics
transform “the lamentations over Canada’s belatedness that characterized the nationalist 1970s
into a millennial celebration of Canada’s – belatedly discovered – firstness” (674). Canada’s lack
of stable identity, national genesis and collective ghosts is not a sign of its lack of national unity
but rather a sign of it being “first past the post of the outdated notion of nation” (674). Canada’s
lack of identity becomes the very basis of its firstness, uniqueness, and timeliness within the
emerging transnational world.
The validity or “preposterous” (Söderlind 674) quality of these post-national arguments is beyond the scope of this project. What is relevant to the question of blackening is the manner in which the shared lack of origins and the feeling of lost history connects the narrations of the black diaspora with the narratives of Canada. Black people in Canada are often cited as evidence of Canada’s increasing post-nationalism and as responsible for the loss of a coherent national narrative; these authors turn these accusations into the means by which they can insist on a shared experience of loss and provoke Canada into recognizing their and its legitimacy. They do not undo the meaning of Canada but rather render it diasporic through their narratives of black diasporic life in Canada. I argue that it is precisely the openness of Canada’s national narrative, the lack of a stable history or collective identity, that enables these writers to write Canada as a site within the black diaspora. The lack of identity and singular history that critics have identified in Canadian narrations of nation and in the Canadian canon are reinscribed by Brand, Clarke and McWatt to write black presences within the nation and narrate Canada anew. Like the diasporic figures in these texts, Canada has no identifiable origins or stable heritage by which to justify boundaries between true Canadian heritage and the heritage of others. Rather these narratives translate the losses and absences of stable identity in the black diaspora into Canadianness in order to render Canada diasporic. Indeed, these authors do not abandon Canada as a site or surrender it to the “global soup of neo-conservatism” (19 – 20) but rather rewrite the nation from

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71 Kamboureli indicates this shared sense of lack between narrations of Canada and narrations of diaspora in her assessment of the field of Canadian Ethnic Anthologies: “The consciousness of no longer belonging to a cultural continuum induces a feeling of lack. Lack is imaged in terms both of a distant originary place and of the subject’s lack of sameness vis-à-vis the dominant society. The writing in these anthologies articulates this lack” (Scandalous 138). I suggest that Kamboureli confuses lack with loss as the experience of “no longer belonging to a cultural continuum” indicates the loss of something that was once possessed. As such, one experiences the loss of a cultural continuum as well as the loss of the “distant originary place” in conjunction with the “lack of sameness vis-à-vis the dominant society.” Similarly, Coleman discovers in Masculine Migrations, “Loss, as Masculine Migrations shows, returns again and again as a masculine theme [in the texts Coleman studies]. As an indication of crisis, loss represents a moment of instability that can be tipped towards either constraint or innovation” (168 – 9).
a black diasporic perspective. George Elliott Clarke’s assertion that “blackness possesses a Canadian dimension that is recognized by engaging with black cultural works located here” (Odysseys 10; italics in original) is rewritten by these authors as a mutual shaping of the meaning of blackness and Canada in these texts. As such these authors give critical meaning to notions of recognition, national belonging and “the multicultural heritage of Canadians.” If there is a multicultural heritage of Canadians, it is a heritage that remains open and is continually inflected by a “complicated process of memory and emergence” that renders diaspora vital. At a time when the language of multiculturalism rings so hollow that it is synonymous with the reduction of “the Canadian nation to bite-sized chunks” and The Globe And Mail insists that Canadians “Strike multiculturalism from the national vocabulary,” these authors reinvigorate the language and politics of Canadian multiculturalism. They write in the gaps of Canada’s lack of national unity, ghosts, traumas and collective identity in order to take possession of the openness and thereby locate blackness here. The narratives considered in this project do not aim to fill in the absences produced by narrations of nation and diaspora but rather to engage in productive acts of crossing, rewriting and blackening that locate both the possibilities and pain of double-consciousness within, across, and at odds with narrations of nation.
Beginning: “Blah, Blah, Blah”

Emergent Critical Multiculturalism in Brampton, Ontario

All roads lead to Brampton

-Official Slogan for the City of Brampton, Ontario

This project raises the “tired” question of multiculturalism with renewed urgency and purpose and in the voices of black diasporic writers and critics in Canada. For these figures, as it was for their African-American counterparts and forebears, national belonging and exclusion are contained in and signified by the hyphen and the ampersand. The authors I examine trace their journey from the hyphen to the ampersand, de-scribing their inscription within the frames and protocols of nation formation, blackening the space of the nation in order to inhabit it on their own terms. This journey is both painful and incomplete; the question “Where you from?” encapsulates diasporic double-consciousness, posing the “problem” of the “Negro” within the cosy confines of nation and tearing the black self apart. But “Where you from” is also open to reclamation, as the comedian Russell Peters points out in the same Globe and Mail series on multiculturalism that I discussed at the outset.

Peter Scowen interviews Peters and three other non-white comedians in Canada. Scowen finds it “refreshing to see someone being so unabashed about asking people what their ethnic background is” (“Four Comics”). Peters responds,

I think it’s the way I grew up. My dad would always do that. We’d almost play that game, wherever we’d go [imitates father], ‘You see that guy? I bet he’s blah blah blah.’
We’d walk by and he’d ask, Where are you from? ‘I’m Polish.’ [imitates father again] ‘I told you!’

...

I find everyone is sensitive. It’s actually funny when people get weird about it. ‘What are you?’ ‘What do you mean? I’m a human!’ You’re a dumb-ass, is what you are.

(“Four Comics”)

Is Peters right? Are the writers in my study just whiners and dumb-asses (again, the hyphen!) or is Peters’s consideration of the hyphen more complicated than it initially appears? Perhaps Peters is simply responding to Scowen’s dare—to demonstrate how “unabashed” he is about discussing ethnicity. Yet what I find interesting about Peters’s response is his claiming of the question, and the right to interrogate identity, as his own. He conceives of the question not as a means by which white Canada marginalizes others but as a question that can be asked by a non-white interrogator of a white person. Unlike the writers in this study who are always on the receiving end of the question, always placed outside of the imaginative community by virtue of their blackness, Peters insists that he can be the one asking the question. Peters reimagines the question of “where you from” as a sort of game and playing the game becomes a way in which he and his family lay claim to the space of Brampton and the identity of Canadian. His response, like his comedy, conceives of ethnicity as a free-floating signifier. Peters's comedic inscription of cross-cultural hybridity turns racism and white liberal guilt simultaneously into sources of hilarity and grounds for outrage. The interstitiality of diasporic life is a source of great hilarity in Peters’s comedic inscription of cross-cultural hybridity. For Peters the actual meaning of racial or cultural identity is irrelevant, as it is replaced by “blah blah blah;” he is more interested in the multicultural
comedy that arises between ethnic identities and in the way that those identities are assumed or performed by Canadians.

Peters is obviously different from the writers in this study in that he is not black and is of a younger generation than Brand, Clarke, Bissoondath and McWatt. While Peters is certainly diasporic, the double-consciousness that structures these authors’ negotiation of nation and blackness is not present in Peters’s work. Yet, I contend that Peters’s response is indicative of the shifting way in which questions of race and citizenship are being conceived of in Canada. Peters’s appropriation of the question operates as a hopeful gesture of inclusion and as a different and emergent form of multiculturalism. For instance, he begins his autobiography, *Call Me Russell* (2010), thus:

I’m never just a comic. No matter how people describe me, there’s always something before my name or my profession. There’s always that hyphen: South-Asian Comic, Indo-Canadian comic, South-Asian-Canadian comic, Canadian-born-Indian comic, Brampton-raised stand-up comic … To my friends and family, though, there’s no hyphen. They just call me Russell. To me, I’m just a comedian who happens to be Indian . . . or wait, Canadian . . . or Indo-Canadian . . . Anglo-Indian, South-Asian, South-Asian Canadian? Jeez, even I’m confused. (9; ellipses in original)

For all his criticism of the sensitivity towards the question of origin Peters reveals his own uncertainty and amusement when he comments on the politics of the hyphen and his struggle against his own hyphenation. Indeed, Peters's iteration of this baffling array of identities along with the ellipses in this passage recall Daphne’s expression of “Nothing.” Like Daphne, Peters worries that the hyphen renders him a cliché, a species of emerging Canadian exotica, or, simply, "Nothing," effacing the presence of "Russell" himself.
While I find Peters’s attitude towards the hyphen compelling, I am particularly interested in the origins of that stance. He insists that his nonchalance towards and curiosity about the question of “Where you from” emerges from “the way I grew up” and perhaps also the place in which Peters grew up: Brampton, Ontario. Like Peters, I grew up in Brampton and the genesis of this inquiry is certainly located in Brampton’s strange project of isolated and segmented suburban space and ongoing and exciting mix of cultures. I share an affinity with Peters’s unshakeable fascination with cultural difference, with the hilarity, sadness, and possibility that emerge between cultures and with a healthy skepticism towards the capacity of official multiculturalism to model the experience of people caught between cultures and within the logic of the hyphen. Having moved from England to Canada at a young age, I lived in Niagara Falls and Toronto before my family settled in the newly laid suburbs of Brampton. One of my first memories of Brampton life is of when my parents sent a copy of my class photograph to my family in England. They were shocked, in a distinctly Northern-English way, at the visible lack of white students in my class. This was not the colony they had signed up for! The paradoxical belief that I should not be surrounded by (visible) immigrants in a country in which I was an immigrant was apparent to neither myself nor my relatives at the time. Indeed, up until this time the meaning of race and cultural differences for me had more to do with food, music and learning to swear in other languages than with an understanding of white privilege, racism or cultural segmentation. Yet it seems clear to me now that growing up in Brampton provided an undeniable “public pedagogy” (Giroux’s (1981) well-known adaptation of Freire (1970)) in multiculturalism and race.

Multiculturalism in Brampton is not simply government policy but is everyday reality. Certainly there is the prescriptive multiculturalism of the classroom and workplace that so many
people in Brampton mockingly describe as sensitivity training or ethnic training. There is also a
long and relatively unknown history of racism in the city ranging from the early persecution of
Irish Catholics by members of the Brampton and Orangeville Orange Order to the 1992 shooting
of Michael Wade Lawson by the Peel Regional Police (the officers were acquitted). Yet, despite
the undeniable and persistent racism in Brampton, there is also something occurring in Brampton
that suggests a far more interesting and exciting critical kind of multiculturalism emerging from
the city’s combination of suburban space and mélange of peoples. There are forms of cultural
production and of citizenship emerging from Brampton that demonstrate awareness of being part
of an unplanned project of cultural mixing, transferral of cultural meaning and of what it means to
be part of a broader multicultural experiment. This is particularly true of young people in
Brampton who possess something like a double awareness of multiculturalism as a state-
sponsored, watered down substitute for anti-racism and also as a lived reality and a source of new
and exciting possibilities. It seems evident to me that the residents’ awareness of the unique
forms of cross-cultural interaction that occur in Brampton displays a “critical multiculturalism”
that possesses a vibrancy and dynamism and is far closer to Brand’s sense of “interpolation” and
Daphne’s “chameleon” identity than state multiculturalism. Indeed, this critical multiculturalism
emerges from the experience of everyday interpolation combined with seeing that daily
experience modeled and theorized so poorly in the banal celebrations of CultureFest and
CaraBram. It seems to me that this sophistication of thinking about multiculturalism arises from
the tension between a lived reality of identity as difference and the liberal state’s representation of
that reality — identity as sacred object and multiculturalism as a kind of museum of identities.

I avoid using the term double-consciousness in this instance to ensure that the legacy of black people’s
exclusion from nation isn’t equated with what I am describing in Brampton. The two forms of negotiating
culture, race and nation share similarities but need to be distinguished.
This is akin to a critical reading practice that is aware of the contradictions of multicultural life and of the notion of identity within multiculturalism.

Russell Peters’s comedy, business names such as Khalsa Gas, Liberation Lounge and Heritage Fish and Chips give some sense of the unpredictable and inadvertent hybrid identities and multicultural vibrancy that I observe emerging in Brampton. There is a closeness between people of all cultures in Brampton that makes a self-conscious multiculturalism virtually impossible to avoid. I can vividly remember the images of the aftermath of Operation Bluestar that were circulated around my classroom in local Sikh newspapers and I struggled to understand their relevance to my life in Brampton. The closeness between people in Brampton overrides, in some ways, the segmentation and atomization of suburban life. Whereas Clarke depicts the racially-managed “periphractic space” that Idora occupies in downtown Toronto, Brampton seems to offer a different kind of space that puts self and other into interaction with one another such that those categories of identity lose their polarity and oppositional quality. I have often wondered whether it is this closeness that led Rohinton Mistry from Toronto to Brampton. I am always annoyed when critics attempt to juxtapose Mistry’s hurried, hybrid and exciting life in Bombay with what they assume must be a dreary, monastic and isolated life in the hinterlands of Brampton. They don’t consider that perhaps not all political and multicultural life happens south of Bloor Street in Toronto. Similarly, when Brand describes Brampton (and other suburbs) as a place where immigrants go to forget their pasts and escape other immigrants, she misses a great deal of the excitement that happens in these places despite themselves.

This project certainly has its roots in Brampton where there is a constant awareness of cultural difference, race and of how this ongoing interpolation may be leading to a different kind of culture. There are parlances, postures, gestures and affectations that are emerging from
Brampton’s unique mix of immigrants. In place of state multiculturalism, there is something akin to what Henry A. Giroux describes as critical or “insurgent multiculturalism” (326) that conceives of identity as non-essential, interested, conjunctural, and discursive. Giroux argues that critical or insurgent multiculturalism aims to “bring a wider variety of cultures into dialogue with each other, to theorize about cultures in the plural, within rather than outside ‘antagonistic relations of domination and subordination’” (337). This is opposed to the state multiculturalism that traffics in identity as a prized possession and promises to “protect and preserve” the inner kernel of cultural identity. When Peters replaces the inner, privileged marker of ethnic identity with “blah blah blah,” he engages in just such a critical multiculturalism that imagines identity as textual and produced through difference. This is the kind of interpolation that Brand describes and longs for throughout her corpus. Indeed, in *Map to the Door of No Return* Brand quotes Chantal Mouffe’s argument (from “For a Politics of Nomadic Identity” (1994)) that “Every identity is irremediably destabilized by its ‘exterior’” (109). Brand cites Mouffe’s argument as part of her critique of origins and what it might mean to conceive of the “interior” of identity as “something purely contingent” (109). Mouffe argues that “Inasmuch as objectivity always depends on an absent otherness, it is always necessarily echoed and contaminated by this otherness” (109 – 10) and that “What we commonly call ‘cultural identity’ is both the scene and the object of political struggles. The social existence of the group is always constructed through conflict” (110). I argue that within Brampton there is an ongoing and continuous process of being “contaminated by ... otherness” and this is a productive kind of contamination that produces the simultaneously wounded yet also hopeful identities of a more critical form of multiculturalism. Peters’s comedy investigates what it means to be “both the scene and object of political struggles” in his translation of authentic identity into “blah blah blah.” In Peters’s work and in the forms of insurgent
multiculturalism that I identify in Brampton, identity is no longer something one discovers but becomes, as Daphne learns, a continuous act of transformation and inscription that is “continuously contaminated by ... otherness.” These are, in Szeman’s terms, acts of translation that keep the ongoing process of translation in view such that the dialogue and conflict between identities comes to take the place of authentic identity. The shift from the banal forms of multiculturalism that these authors critique to a more critical multiculturalism involves abandoning claims to authentic identity and instead conceiving of identity in difference, in dialogue and as “both the scene and object of political struggles.”

I am not arguing that Bramptonians somehow, between their day jobs and lengthy commutes, have solved the multicultural riddle and are now basking in the flux of non-essential and radically democratic identities. What I am arguing is that there is a continuous awareness in everyday Brampton life that implicitly acknowledges the destabilization of any interior space of identity. This goes beyond the plethora of flags attached to cars during the World Cup or the cultural displays of the Peel Heritage Complex. In place of these reifications or subsumptions of difference and social division is a form of interaction organized around the conditional nature of identity. In Laclau and Mouffe’s terms, if state-sponsored multiculturalism performs a hegemonic function that aims to suture social space and identities, then I suggest that within this critical multiculturalism there is an awareness and pronouncement of the antagonism at the heart of Canadian multiculturalism.

73The Peel Heritage Complex is the only pseudo-museum in Brampton and always suggested to me that Peel has something of a heritage complex. The irony that the Heritage Complex was once a jail seems to have been lost on Brampton city officials although my class trips to the complex often felt like a prison sentence. Huey Newton, when imprisoned in the now Peel Heritage Complex, complained that it was “worse than any jail in Cuba” (Brown, *Behind Bars* 12).
I end with this discussion of the meaning of race and cultural difference in Brampton not to engage in an assessment of my own politics of location or to force my own biography into this project. Rather, I want to suggest some of the ways that my own critical work takes up some of the same questions that these authors have engaged in their texts. I see each of these authors concerned with the way in which black diasporic subjects in Canada negotiate nation and the complex ways in which multicultural Canada engages black subjects through oscillating techniques of erasure and presence. Furthermore, these authors’ projects of blackening and of becoming diasporic inscribe a space for the antagonisms of race and diaspora in Canada. They respond to the question of “Where you from” through their inscription of diasporic double-consciousness and their depiction of the feeling of being “torn asunder” by the antagonisms and contradictions of what it means to be black and diasporic in Canada. While I do not want to try and generalize black diasporic double-consciousness to apply to all diasporic people or all migrants, I do want to suggest that the kind of longing, affectations, postures and antagonisms of diasporic life that these authors observe are present in Brampton public life. Certainly the comedy of Russell Peters is a far cry from the torrid history of slavery, the haunting figure of the Door of No Return or the brutal state violence committed against Albert Johnson. Yet I do suggest that in Brampton there is an emerging process of “becoming diasporic” that eclipses the organized forms of multiculturalism. This “becoming diasporic” is far closer to the kind of subjectivities, citizens and politics longed for in each of these authors than state multiculturalism offers.

Throughout this project I have detailed the way in which these writers conceive of narrative as not just giving texture to black diasporic life but also as a structuring element of that life. The narrative acts that accompany diasporic life are ways of making sense of acts of migration and of writing against the confining and limiting move of the question “Where you
from?” Like the authors in this study and like Peters, my acts of criticism constitute a means by which I am attempting to understand, disentangle and perhaps resolve the contradictory elements of multicultural Canada. My critical readings constitute, in Szeman’s terms, acts of translation and writing, thus becoming narrative acts of their own, reinscribing the contradictions and antagonisms among identity, nation, and race that these texts identify.

These acts of narration constitute a public intervention that links the “semiotic” with the “discursive” (Hall) and gives voice to the kind of critical multiculturalism which these authors are advocating. Peters’s comedic narratives do not merely retell his diasporic family romance but intervene in a public discourse of ethnicity and race to reveal, register, and laugh at the antagonisms of that discourse. The same is true of the authors in this study who, in their acts of narration, reinvent the romance and horror of the slave past to blacken their Canadian present. Finally, my own acts of criticism engage in a type of narration that rewrites, as palimpsest, the texts that I read in order to foreground their aporias. I regard this project as an act of citizenship and public intervention that discerns the antagonisms of the social and revels in the coming undone of both nation and narration.
Appendix A: Works Cited


---. “‘We weren’t allowed to go into the factory until Hitler started the war’: The 1920s to the 1940s.” Bristow et al. 171 – 192.


---. “Witnesses for constables testify Police were at Johnson’s at least twice before.” *Globe and Mail* [Toronto] 5 Nov. 1980: P.5. Print.


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