“Are African Canadians Always and Only Marginals and Transients?” The Politics and Poetics of Fanon’s Children

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Abstract Robin Winks’s The Blacks in Canada (1971) is advertised as the only historical survey that covers all aspects of the Black experience in Canada, from the introduction of slavery in 1628 to the first wave of Caribbean immigration in the 1950s and 1960s. However, its depiction of African Canadians as inauthentic Blacks and aberrant Canadians has been critiqued by intellectuals such as George Elliott Clarke. This paper draws on material from the Robin Winks archives at Yale University in order to substantiate Clarke’s charges against the small-l liberal, American bias of Winks’s account. In doing so, it contends that Clarke can be read as one of ‘Frantz Fanon’s children’, i.e. one of the ‘honest intellectuals’ born circa 1952 (the first publication of Fanon’s Peau noire, masques blancs) and 1961 (the original publication of Fanon’s Les Damnés de la Terre), who challenged profiteers and schemers when they raced for positions and pensions in the early days of neoliberal multiculturalism in the 1980s and 90s. The essay also addresses Clarke’s equation of Rinaldo Walcott’s ‘shouting down of history’ with ‘liberal lies’, but this is not done in order to recycle debates about tensions between Caribbean and Canadian-born Blacks. Instead of emphasising the differences between Clarke and Walcott, I point out their similar approaches to Black British Cultural Studies in the hopes of encouraging more expansive discussions of the peculiar generational afflictions facing the children of Fanon. To be more specific, I note their connections to Paul Gilroy and Black Atlantic scholars who critique old-fashioned liberalism and demand mature responses to the threat of neoliberal multiculturalism.

“This fight for democracy against the oppression of mankind will slowly leave the confusion of neoliberal universalism to emerge, sometimes laboriously, as a claim to nationhood … We ought not to cultivate the exceptional or to seek for a hero, who is another form of leader. We ought to uplift the people; we must develop their brains, fill them with ideas, change them and make them into human beings.” Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (2001 [1961])

“A lot of people can’t keep up with what words are acceptable these days and what words aren’t. It’s like my dad, for example, he’s not as cosmopolitan or as educated as me and it can be embarrassing. He doesn’t understand all the trendy new words … He’ll say ‘poofs’ instead of ‘gays’, ‘birds’ instead of ‘women’, ‘darkies’ instead of ‘coloureds’.” The Office (2001)
Co-written by Ricky Gervais, a comedian whose father emigrated from Canada to Britain while on foreign duty during the Second World War, *The Office* is one of the most successful British television exports of all time. First screened in Britain between 2001 and 2005, it has been sold around the world and adapted by new writers, casts and crews in Canada, Chile, France, Germany, Israel and the United States. Such adaptations reveal the broad appeal of the original series and the high esteem with which British comedy is held around the world. Yet they also indicate that British television shows often need to do more than insert subtitles for foreign markets.

While Gervais has been celebrated for his creative adaptations of American artistry in the twenty-first century (*The Office* is influenced by Jewish American comedy as much as, if not more than, anything British (McNeil 2009, 108)), Paul Gilroy has won acclaim for his ability to translate British culture for American audiences. Gilroy’s *Postcolonial Melancholia*, which revised the Wellek Lectures he delivered at the Critical Theory Institute in the University of California, Irvine in 2002, has been particularly significant in attempts to hail him as “the most influential intellectual writing in Britain today” (MacCabe 2006). Written in “exile” in New England, and in response to “many brief, painful, and exhilarating journeys back to the homeland” he was never quite sure that he had, *Postcolonial Melancholia* draws on a number of cultural texts that come to terms with Britain’s limited role as a world power without becoming “anxious, fearful, or violent” (Gilroy 2005, xiv-xv).

Gervais’s outernational engagement with British melancholia and American comedy is one of the prominent texts that Gilroy used to expose the pitfalls of a society that consumes nostalgic memories of white heroes fighting for the British Empire, lives vicariously through U.S. scripts and statecraft, and tries to impose top-down forms of multiculturalism designed by bureaucrats (Ibid., 136-9). Gilroy is particularly interested in the militaristic ethos of Gareth Keenan, a character in the original series who served as the assistant to the regional manager and a part-time member of the Territorial Army. In one memorable example of postcolonial melancholia, Keenan reminisces about a time “before racism was bad,” and expresses nostalgia for a cultural climate that allowed white viewers to consume *The Dambusters* (1955), a British film about the Second World War, without feeling guilty about the prominent role given to a black dog called “Nigger.” Yet Keenan’s comments could equally apply to British comedians who made jokes about “darkies” and “jungle bunnies” on family-friendly, light entertainment shows like *The Black and White Minstrel Show* (1958-1978); a 1964 by-election that included the infamous campaign slogan, “if you want a nigger for a neighbour, vote Labour”; or the soccer hooligans who chanted “there ain’t no black in the Union Jack” during the 1970s and 80s.
Literal translations of these British forms of racism would be difficult in Canada during the Cold War, especially after it replaced the Union Jack with the Maple Leaf as its official flag in 1965 and established full and final political independence from the United Kingdom in 1982. However, Gilroy’s (2001, 21) desire to consider and appreciate the “degree of difference from an implicit white norm” – which corporate forms of multiculturalism have prized as signs of “timeliness, vitality, inclusivity and global reach” – closely relates to the work of a number of scholars who critically engage with cultural texts that have emerged following the adoption of multiculturalism as an official policy of Canada in 1971 and the 1982 Multiculturalism Act.

Peter Hudson’s (2008, 70) response to the recent attempts to market a “minor blizzard of blackness” in Canada’s literary scene – and the National Hockey League – is one particularly revealing example of cultural critique in Canada that can be read alongside Gilroy’s work. While alluding to Gilroy’s supra-national concerns with revolutionary capitalism, Hudson’s comparison between hockey and Canadian literature also sheds new light on the increased prominence of Black authors in the Canadian national imaginary (Chariandy 2002, 212n3). The incisive and irreverent tone of Hudson’s essay about “Honkey Night in Canada” is much more sophisticated than pundits who write about Black Canadian culture with all the grace of the Hanson brothers in Slap Shot (1977) and, on occasion, its analysis of Black Canadian literature matches the skill of commentators entrusted with one of the most difficult play-by-play jobs in professional sports. However, the essay concludes rather abruptly with a brief note about the continuing influence of Robin Winks’s history of The Blacks in Canada (1971) on articles that attempt to provide new directions for the study of African Canadian culture. While some readers might be tempted to take the hockey metaphor into overtime by comparing the spectral effect of Winks’s text on Black Canadian studies to the after-life of the Canada/Soviet Union Summit Series of 1972 in Canadian popular culture, this essay focuses on the work of George Elliott Clarke – the critic, librettist, poet, playwright and E.J Pratt Professor of Canadian Literature at the University of Toronto – who is a dominant presence in Hudson’s essay.

In Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature (2002, 287), Clarke chronicles the work of people’s intellectuals who challenged racist caricatures and liberal tokenism before and after the publication of Winks’s history. In relation to contemporary Canadian writing, the book documents the work of writers such as Dionne Brand, Afua Cooper, Lawrence Hill and Rinaldo Walcott, who have revised depictions of the past in which all the Canadians are thought to be white and all the Black Canadians are thought to be immigrants (Ibid. 8, 201). It also takes aim at the “small-l liberal, American bias” of The Blacks in Canada, and the deleterious effects of a liberal discourse in North America is a
leitmotif of Clarke’s writing (Ibid., 64). His doctoral dissertation, for example, argued that English Canadian and African American cultures “share a similar political philosophy, namely, that of a classical conservative collectivism stressing communitarian values and a respect for tradition”, and had both been cast in a “dissident or dissenting relationship with mainstream American – essentially liberal – culture” (Clarke 1993, ii).³

Frantz Fanon’s nuanced and wide-ranging work includes a powerful condemnation of the inhumanity and sickness of American culture (Fanon 2001, 252), and plays a prominent role in Clarke’s (2002, 13-14) reflections about the political trinity of socialism, liberalism and conservatism. That is to say, Clarke praises Fanon as a socialist liberationist father who, à la Aimé Césaire, dreams of a new humanism that destroys the ruthless Manichaeism of colonialism. Yet Clarke also gives thanks to Fanon as a liberal son who, much like Pierre Elliott Trudeau (the fifteenth prime minister of Canada and the subject of Clarke’s dramatic poem, Trudeau: Long March, Shining Shadow (2007a)), maintains the right of individuals to roam beyond boundaries and return home to a hero’s welcome. In addition, Clarke’s insistence that no writer is able to write independently of communal identification honours Fanon’s conservative spirit as well as George Grant’s lament for the death of a nation.

My argument is that Clarke can be read as one of “Fanon’s children” – a cohort born circa 1952 (the year of the first publication of Peau Noire, Masques Blanches) and 1961 (the year of the original publication of Les Damnés de la Terre and Fanon’s death) who, like the “honest intellectuals” in Fanon’s manifestos (2001, 142), come from a “strictly moral upbringing” and express a “manifest contempt for profiteers and schemers.” I contend that these children of Fanon asserted their own intellectual projects, in part, by challenging an older cohort of liberal academics, artists and educators who sublimated or marginalized his work. Robin Winks is used to illustrate this cohort of Fanon’s peers, born circa 1925 and 1933, which includes individuals such as Norman Jewison, a Canadian director of films about race relations in the United States, Michael Banton, a British scholar of race and racialization, and Jane Elliott, an American educator and anti-racist activist. Clarke is used to illustrate a cohort of Fanon’s children who challenged profiteers and schemers in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, but I also allude to other key members of this cohort – such as bell hooks, Armond White, Cornel West and Paul Gilroy – who have produced critical reflections about Fanon’s after-life in neoliberal times.

Little work has been done to connect the “generational concerns” of Fanon’s children in the transatlantic world. However, the intellectual work of this cohort can be related to themes and issues relating to studies of a neoliberal revolution and nostalgia.⁴ The cultural project of neoliberalism, with its emphasis on the construction of identity and the celebration of difference, bears
an uncanny resemblance to the theoretical and strategic commitments of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham (Grossberg 2000, 83), and cultural critics influenced by the normative assumptions of Marxist-humanism have been asked to clarify their relationship to Left melancholia and nostalgia (Brown 1999; Bonnett 2010). Similarly, “Fanon’s children” have been challenged for their failure to engage more thoroughly with postcolonial, feminist and queer theory that addresses the contradictions at work when different rhetorics and practices come together in the same moment or political space (Pedwell 2010). Intellectuals who participated in a diasporic youth culture that, during the 1960s and 70s, was heavily influenced by the freedom dreams that emanated from Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas, have not only been subjected to ad hominem and/or materialist arguments that holders of distinguished posts in elite universities cannot continue to speak to the concerns of “grassroots activists” outside of the academy (Christian 2002).

After documenting Clarke’s responses to The Blacks in Canada, this paper concludes by addressing Rinaldo Walcott’s critique of Clarke in Black Like Who? Although the polemical charge of Clarke’s academic and journalistic work has received far less attention than his award-winning fiction, his debates with Walcott have often featured in discussions about the direction of Black Canadian Studies. In their exchanges, Clarke (2002, 202) has interpreted Walcott’s work as a “shouting down of history” that is comparable to “liberal lies”, and Walcott (2003b, 119) has claimed that historical archives only allow us to “play more carefully with another kind of trinity: history, memory and fiction.” Drawing attention to the (passive) aggressive nature of their rhetoric, commentators have recycled themes and issues from the 1960s about Caribbean disdain towards Canadian-born Blacks, and claimed that Clarke, “the Scotian … sees in Walcott a representative of a Toronto-centred West Indian literary mafia that aims to control black Canada’s literary future by turning it into an ‘immigrant literature’” (Hudson 2008, 78). Without ignoring the differences between Clarke’s studies of poly consciousness in African Canadian culture and Walcott’s Black Canadian Diaspora Studies – which have been noted by Hudson and many other contributors to Black Canadian Studies – this essay identifies their similar approach to prominent representatives of Black British Cultural Studies. For while Clarke and Walcott have different responses to the theoretical contributions of Paul Gilroy, they often fail to contextualize their interpretations of his theories with reference to the lived experience of Blacks in the United Kingdom. This investment in a North American framework, or a loose confederation of the Caribbean and the Americas, means that they are unable to address Robin Winks’s decision to marginalize the connections between Blacks in Britain and Black in Canada. On occasion, it also undermines their critique of liberalism.
The “liberal, American bias” of Robin Winks

The jacket cover of *The Blacks in Canada* (1997) claims that Winks’s sweeping history is “the only historical survey that covers all aspects of the Black experience in Canada, from the introduction of slavery in 1628 to the first wave of Caribbean immigration in the 1950s and 1960s”. This promotional material suggests that *The Blacks in Canada* remains popular in secondary and post-secondary education courses because it combines scholarly rigour and dynamic prose, but it also hints at the book’s schematic and didactic approach to four centuries of African Canadian history. Winks’s depiction of Canada after the abolition of slavery, which constitutes almost half of the book, exemplifies his desire to construct liberal, “teachable moments.” He constructed four chapters around the church, the schools, the press and voluntary organizations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and claimed that these institutional sources had not done enough to help guide African Canadians into the modern world (Ibid. 334-5). Revealingly, he omitted African Canadian arts and culture from his list of potential strengths, and only praised Black writers who worked hard to place their work in what he considered “better” journals, i.e. those that were predominantly “white” (Ibid., 392n6).

In the preface to the second edition of *The Blacks in Canada*, Winks maintained that his historical account was not a “political tract” written from a commitment to New Deal liberalism (Ibid., xvi). With that said, he was willing to confess that he wrote the book under the influence of liberal social scientific work that called for secular solutions to the “race problem” in North America. He acknowledged his intellectual debts to John Porter’s 1965 book, *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada* (which had been clear in his hopes for “post-industrial” citizens transcending race in a concluding chapter entitled “The Black Tile in the Mosaic”), and Gunner Myrdal (Ibid., xiv).

Myrdal is well-known for his role supervising the production of *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (1944). This wide-ranging study, which was funded by the Ford Foundation, reflected the claims of anthropologists and sociologists in the early twentieth century, such as Frank Boas, Otto Klineberg and Robert Park, that race was a social construction rather than a biological phenomenon. Such an emphasis on the social construction of race facilitated opposition to the permanent superiority and permanent inferiority of races, and played an important role in the reduction of racial prejudice that emerged after the Second World War and UNESCO’s first statement on race in 1950. However, these accounts of racial liberalism not only exalted legal campaigns, educational programs, and sweeping histories in order to erode racial discrimination and racial prejudice – they also paid little attention to the anti-
racism of Black Leftists and only replaced the idea of “race” with culture after national cultures in the “overdeveloped world” had been explicitly cemented along anti-Communist lines (Singh 2004; Melamed 2006). To go further, they often deemed cultures that were sub- or supra-national to be matriarchal, delinquent and immature (Waters 1997; Ferguson 2004; McNeil 2010a). Consequently, three interrelated features of Winks’s historiography deserve elaboration in order to preface Clarke’s sorties against his “liberal lies”: 1) its faith in honest men leading “dark strangers” into a progressive, nonracial future, 2) its desire to sublimate Black militancy into national or continental norms, and 3) its fear that Black radicals would become irresponsible demagogues.

Winks (1997, xvii) was convinced that “leadership remains basic to all human endeavor.” Even when he agreed that prominent historical figures may have committed immoral acts by contemporary standards, Winks (1973) did not think that anyone had the right to employ an “unhistorical prose style” and force contemporary judgments upon historical figures. Dissatisfied with moral exhortations about subaltern social identities and deterministic structures, his correspondence expressed discomfort with “sarcasm and satire … [used] to beat … bloody, self-deluded, self-righteous” British figures from the past (Winks 1974). In his published work on Black Canada, Winks (1997, 81) claimed that white leaders in the eighteenth century were free of racial bias when they claimed to understand “the Negro mentality” and “took a Negro mistress”, and was sympathetic to dynamic figures in the nineteenth century who were unable to transcend prejudices about the need to protect white women from the “loose morals” of black men (Ibid., 333).

When he turned his attention to the twentieth century, Winks also chose to highlight the lack of racial discrimination in Canada (Ibid., 444). Since white politicians were willing to have their photographs taken with non-whites – and accept technically proficient workers from Africa and Asia as Canadian immigrants – Winks reprimanded a minority of Caribbean students and “paranoid” Blacks who detected “racial insults … where none are intended” (Ibid. 470). He felt that Black Canadians “usually wanted nothing more than to be accepted as quiet Canadians...[and] were unlikely to organize militant, noisy, pushy protests” (Ibid. 466-8), and celebrated Black immigrants who expressed their commitment to civil rights in Canada by supporting liberal, multiracial organizations. Winks was particularly impressed by the American-born Daniel Hill III. He praised his “quiet” leadership of the Ontario Human Rights Commission (Ibid., 428, 450-1), and listed Hill as a reference when he applied for a promotion at Yale. According to Winks, the human rights leader and “Negro sociologist” considered the portion of The Blacks in Canada that had been sent to the Canadian Commission on Biculturalism and Bilingualism, in advance of its official publication, to be as good and accurate as anything he could hope to do.
in campaigns against serious discrimination in housing, education and employment (Winks c. 1967; McNeil 2007).

With that said, there were significant differences between the intellectual projects of Hill and Winks. Whereas Hill was willing to document African Canadian achievements in his work on *The Freedom Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada* (1981), and founded the Ontario Black History Society in order to promote Blacks who had done “some great thing”, Winks (1956, roll 6) preferred to caricature attempts to celebrate Black role models like the “first Negro milkman in Hamilton”. Aside from questioning the role of the Black Canadian church in propagating these “diversions”, Winks (1997, 403, 478) expressed concerns about the impact of what he saw as “black racism” (Garveyite attempts to instill Black pride), and “unCanadian ideas” (radical writers such as “Baldwin, Genêt, Malcolm X, and Franz Fanon [sic]” stirring up “thoughtless, needless, and frustrated destruction of the twentieth century’s symbol of quantification, the ultimate equality – Sir George Williams University’s computer center”). In criticizing Black radicals who were thought to threaten North America’s progression into a meritocratic, rational-critical age, Winks presented emotional ties to Europe as “more rational” investments than emotional attachments to Africa. On the one hand, the American of Welsh descent believed that ethnic groups like “the Irish … the Scots, the English” could take pride in their “old world cultures” (Ibid., 477). On the other hand, he felt that Black Canadians did not have a “cultural base to which they could return” (Ibid., 482).

Winks returned to some of these questions about reason, emotion and postcolonialism just after the publication of the second edition of *The Blacks in Canada*. In a book chapter about the future of Imperial History (1999, 656), he argued that Fanon had been read “carelessly” by radicals who wanted to argue that all the imperialists were white and all the non-whites were victims. Such attempts to caricature radicalism, in order to contest and seize the position of victim, had been evident in a letter Winks received from Wayne Wilcox, the Cultural Attaché to the US embassy in London in the early 1970s. Yet whereas Wilcox playfully informed Winks that he would obtain quicker induction to the US Council on Foreign Relations if he were “a Black-Chicano woman … with no east coast credentials, on the far left of all known issues” (1973), Winks (1999, 668) expressed his concerns about the legacy of affirmative action and “reverse discrimination” in a spirit of seriousness that supported his contention that historical work needed to be “objective, scholarly, based on sources.” Although he prized interdisciplinary teaching and intellectual curiosity that rejected a “compartmentalized life” (Smith 1983), Winks (1999, 668) was disorientated by the “haphazard” and “inaccessible” work of historians who cited Fanon and Gramsci in order to analyze “hegemonic discourse.” He believed that radical writers were “didactic, blinkered by
secularist or religious perspectives that do not admit to alternative questions, let alone alternative conclusions” (Ibid.).

*Odysseys Home* (2002, 3-6, 22, 285) provides an eloquent reproach to Winks’s concerns when it documents the creative artistry of African Canadians who drew solace from the church, challenged racism in schools, produced journalistic sorties, and used a bullhorn to shake up any quiet complacency in Canadian civil society. It repeatedly proposes alternative questions and conclusions for a cultural history of Black Canada that does not denounce the counter-hegemonic struggles of Black militants as reckless, irresponsible or juvenile. In one of the rejoinders to Winks’s accusations against the mindless violence of Black militants involved in the Sir George Williams affair, the reader is told that a multiracial group of students trashed the computer centre in order “to protest the racist grading of black students” (Ibid., 282n24). We are also reminded that this protest may, along with the FLQ Crisis of October 1970, have helped influence the Canadian Federal Government’s promulgation of an affirmative policy of official multiculturalism in 1971 (Ibid., 65n13). In suggesting these possibilities, Clarke does not deny that many African Canadians seek a “quiet life.” Nor does he evade the potential tensions between Black immigrants from majoritarian black societies and Black Canadians brought up in a Canadian society that labeled them “visible minorities.” Nonetheless, he also positions himself on the vanguard of academic life by denouncing one-dimensional depictions of Black Canadians that appear in the Canadian public sphere, and heeds the famous final prayer of Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986, 232) – “O my body, make of me always a man who questions!”

**George Elliott Clarke: “A leftist, African-Canadian intellectual of African-American and West Indian heritage”**

Fanon’s expansive work is subject to many possible readings (see, for example, Sekyi-Otu 1996; Gordon, Sharpley-Whiting and White 1996). Clarke’s (2002, 13) description of Fanon’s “existentialist, psychoanalytical approach to the problem of black identity in a Eurocentric civilization” – much like Gilroy’s (2000, 15-16) discussion of “Fanon’s phenomenological, existential, and psychoanalytic interests” – engages with Fanon’s call for a new humanism that works with the people to destroy colonial mindsets and Manichean thinking. This appeal for a new humanism, which requires the “liberation of modernity from colonial and neocolonial underdevelopment, and the democratic salvaging of the radical intellectuals ‘technical and intellectual capital’ from alienating uses” (Sekyi-Otu 1996, 181), reflects Fanon’s faith in the ability of the people to actively shape their own history. For while Fanon recognized the pedagogical and political potential of histories that shook the people into developing a new social order, he was wary about biographical reflections that only allowed authors to re-invent their past in, for example, the complicated matrix of colonial desire.
that influenced family romances (Read 1996, 162).8

The history of ideas in this section says little about Clarke’s biography or psychoanalytical readings of his work. Instead, it uses Fanon’s ideas about the formation of intellectuals in order to frame the intellectual work Clarke has produced inside and outside of academia between 1993 and 2010. Since Fanon’s work encourages critical questions rather than dogmatic followers, I also document how Clarke departs from two of Fanon’s polemical charges. In the first place, Clarke is sensitive to the pitfalls of Fanon’s masculine tone that defines itself against translators and interpreters. Secondly, he is willing to insist that bourgeois figures who act as intercultural bridges can have a redeeming role by shaking the people into national and human consciousness. Although many readings of Fanon point out his denunciation of “stupidly, contemptibly, cynically bourgeois” practices and intermediaries for Western business (Fanon 2001, 121, 47), Clarke follows Sekyi-Otu’s (1996, 31, 157) reading of Fanon and notes the “inadvertent exaggerations” of Fanon’s polemical discourse about members of the national bourgeoisie.

When Fanon proposed that a “strictly moral upbringing” was an important feature in the formation of honest intellectuals, Clarke was growing up in a Black working-class community in Nova Scotia that had few institutions, other than the African United Baptist Association, to call its own. During the early days of official multiculturalism in Canada, Clarke added Marxist strictures to the moral codes imparted by the Baptist church, and worked as a student, community activist and social worker in Michigan and Ontario (Clarke 2002, 4). His doctoral dissertation also highlighted the moral, traditional and communitarian values of African American and English Canadian cultures that were developed in opposition to “the dynamic progressivism of mainstream American” values (Clarke 1993, 284). Although Clarke’s essay on the “cool politics” of Malcolm X and Miles Davis can be read as a family romance about two African American heroes old enough to be his father, it also reminds us that he wrote the theoretical discussion of African-American masculinities as a “Leftist, African-Canadian intellectual of African-American and West Indian heritage. Moreover, like [X and Davis] I live with the postcolonial irony that, for all my conscious critique of European--especially Anglo-Saxon--culture, I have inherited, for better or worse, the Anglo-Saxon slavemasters’s love of codes of honour.”

Aside from tracing his work back to the moral philosophy and creative artistry of X, Davis and “Anglo-Saxon culture”, Clarke’s love of honour can be connected to the three stages of Fanon’s native intellectual. Native intellectuals in the first stage of Fanon’s schema are people who produce shameful caricatures of Western Europe and stand accused of treasonous behaviour towards newly independent nations. Some of the metaphors that Fanon uses – he condemns compradors for setting their countries up as “the brothel of Europe” and pimping little “half-breed girls” for Western tourists (2001, 123) – relate closely to his critique of the “educated mulatto woman” who “asks nothing, demands nothing, except a bit of whiteness in her life” (1986, 42).
Although Clarke notes the dangers involved in packaging writers of colour as exotic commodities, he finds Fanon’s tone “unduly, startlingly, vindictive, as if the desires of an imaginary being indicted, somehow, his actual, racialized masculinity” (Clarke 2002, 213). Rather than essentialize people of mixed-race as slimy traitors, Clarke has emphasized the “‘creolization, métissage, mestizaje, hybridity’ of African Canadian literature” (Chariandy 2002, 200), and has produced one of the most complete readings of Wayde Compton’s poem about a “Halfrican nation” (Compton 2010, 220n7). Compton’s (2004, 16) poem about Canadian biraciality and its “zebra” poetics has Fanon’s ghost “kickin back with a coke and rum having/a good chuckle at all this, stirring in the tears, his work/done, lounging with the spirits.” It thus provides us with an important reminder that Clarke appreciates an ironic Fanon who casts a wry glance over the contemporary world, and does not just rely on polemical charges against exotic, mixed-race objects that are often used to symbolise a multicultural future.

Clarke also riffs on the second stage of the native intellectual, in which Fanon (2001, 169) critiques the “banal search for exoticism” in the past. Such retreats from the political organisation and mobilisation needed in the present do not only apply to someone who searches for a glorious African civilization that existed before the advent of the transatlantic slave trade – Fanon’s critique of nostalgia (2001, 178; 1986, 121) also refers to intellectuals who write about images from their childhood communities because they only have exterior or superficial relations with the majority of their contemporaries. In other words, Clarke’s (1993, ii) comparison of English Canadians and African Americans who conserve elements of the social philosophy of British tradition – without any similar attempt to record the conservation or creative adaption of African traditions – is not necessarily a repudiation of Fanon’s intellectual project. Furthermore, Clarke (2002, 4-5, 11, 184) acknowledges that his desire to record his childhood growing up as a working-class, Black (American) Nova Scotian, as well as the creative artistry of his family’s past in Africadia – a culture that honours the history of Acadians, Africans, Mi’kmaqs and Europeans in the Atlantic Canada region – needs to stand on guard against romanticization and “blood-rite fascism”. His short articles for Black History Month in NOW Magazine, one of Toronto’s premier alternative news and entertainment sources, also strive to avoid “bad nostalgia” and sentimental memories. So, while he praises “progressive” stereotypes from the sixties, such as the Panthers and Angela Davis, because they put themselves to work organizing and animating the people by articulating a relationship between a more humane past, present and future, he does not ignore the ways in which iconic images of resistance can be marketed as kitsch souvenirs (2010).

Clarke’s desideratum is similar to Fanon’s (2001, 172) hopes for the third phase of the native intellectual, when individuals educated in a Eurocentric system eschew their elitism and develop revolutionary praxis without renouncing their training in a search for some lost authenticity. According to Fanon (Ibid., 120, 159), intellectuals should follow “a heroic, positive, fruitful and just path …
to put at the people’s disposal the intellectual and technical capital that it has snatched when going through the colonial universities.”

In adapting his doctoral dissertation and essays in academic journals into *Odysseys Home*, Clarke disseminates his work to a wider audience without abandoning his scholarly commitments. In some regards, his postdoctoral work has become more indebted to academic conventions – for example, he emphasized a stoic use of “sic” in his discussion of African American and English Canadian poetry as a PhD student (1993, xii), but seems to find jouissance in the application of “sic” to the errors of other scholars in *Odysseys Home*. Clarke’s emphasis on empirical facts is combined with an engagement with feminist, postcolonial and queer theory, and he prominently features the discussions of irony developed by cultural theorists such as bell hooks and Linda Hutcheon (Clarke 1998; 2002, 6, 287).

Although Clarke (2002, 224) uses these theoretical insights when he tunes in to a Black popular culture that values oral performativity, and hopes that rap can transmit revolutionary values to a younger, so-called “mulatto generation”, he also questions the lack of maturity in hip hop (Gordon 2005). Clarke’s (1998) study of Malcolm X and Miles Davis may have asserted hip hop’s potential to raise the consciousness of Black youth, but his recent articles for Black History Month in *NOW* Magazine (2007b) put at the people’s disposal his critique of liberalism and rappers who “sling around” the n-word.

That is the curious habit of liberals: to pretend that all is well, that the future can only be better and that the past is a mere nuisance ... Word up: Martin King and Malcolm X and Marcus Garvey didn’t die so we could call each other nigger ... that the n-word is still so common proves the powerlessness of African-heritage peoples in white-supremacist societies such as our own. (Think I exaggerate? Note the composition of the judiciary, the legislatures, the corporate directorships.... Read John Porter’s *Vertical Mosaic*, his study of Canadian racial and ethnic stratification.)

The correct response to the epithet “nigger” is not to spit back another slur. No, one must reply with an equally venerable phrase, one requiring actualization now: Black Power!

This extract reveals a number of creative tensions in Clarke’s work. It speaks to his faith in hip hop’s possibilities and his description of its failed practice. It also engages his normative critique of liberalism as well as his appreciation for the liberal treasures of Porter’s facts and the charismatic authority of Trudeau. Probing these tensions further can also allow us to assess Clarke’s later commentaries on Barack Obama in light of Fanon’s warning that the utopian native intellectual must resist messianic calls for a redemptive leader.

Fanon (2001, 160, 158) emphasized decentralization and cooperation rather than “sweeping, dogmatic formulae” used to “cultivate the exceptional or to seek for a hero, who is another form of leader.” Some of Fanon’s children have scolded Obama for what they consider his individual...
opportunism and unprincipled use of heroic members of the civil rights movement. For example, Armond White and Cornel West have expressed their contempt for the beige persona and non-threatening exoticism of Obama (White 2008; Hedges 2011). Such concerns reflect Harold Cruse’s (1967, 84) contention that mixed-race individuals have long been favoured by white liberals and offered a special role as intermediary in American interracial affairs. A close reader of Cruse’s *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, Clarke does not believe that Cruse’s polemical text did enough to challenge the “common prejudice” against “mixed-race Blacks” (Clarke 2002, 182-183), but he does support Cruse’s (1967, 556-7) opposition to any dark-skinned chauvinism that would exclude “tantalizingly tan” individuals from notions of authentic Blackness in predominantly white societies. In fact, Clarke (2002, 206n10) repeats Cruse’s insights when they relate to emigrants from majoritarian black societies in Africa and the Caribbean who do not necessarily possess a “race consciousness” and, in his articles celebrating Black History Month (2008), emphasizes Obama’s “uncomplicated mixed persona.”

Born one year before Obama, Clarke is sensitive to the “generational afflictions” of public figures who straddle the diasporic and humanistic concerns of Fanon’s children and the “children of Harold Cruse” (Neal 2002, 102), i.e. American “Soul Babies” born after the March on Washington in 1963 who are not committed to nostalgic portrayals of the civil rights movement (unless they are profitable). In his brief articles in the Canadian free press, Clarke repeats the rhetoric of a prophetic campaign that constructed Obama as a bridge between a Moses generation and a Joshua generation, i.e. a civil rights generation and a post-civil rights generation. In articles of 1000 words or less he does not have the time or inclination to discuss how Obama has fashioned and refashioned his public persona. He is not able to document Obama’s neo-Fanonian decision to define his Black masculine persona against “half-breeds and the college-degreed” as a student activist (Obama 2007, 92; McNeil 2009, 96-101). Clarke also omits to mention Obama’s decision to talk to the American people about his “white blood”, distance himself from the Communists who sell radical newspapers on the fringes of college, and deprecate the clichés from Marx and Fanon he espoused as an undergraduate (Obama 2007, xv; Remnick 2010, 113; McNeil 2010, 94-5). With that said, Clarke’s carefully crafted comments allude to these points and more. His description of Obama as someone who is “more or less moral (but not smug) and somehow inspirationally bourgeois” is a particularly telling example (Clarke 2009a, emphasis added). This is because qualifying phrases such as “more or less” and “somehow” mean that Clarke celebrates Obama as a Black icon without ignoring the critical and ethical responses to Obama’s role in the Machiavellian world of politics.

**Black Like Fanon? Black Canadian – and Black British – Cultural Studies**

In order to analyze Clarke’s longing for a “Canadian Obama” – someone
comfortable talking about their non-European ancestors while holding a position of economic, military, political and/or ideological power in the Canadian (vertical) mosaic – we need to do more than dissect Clarke’s melancholia for a Canadian nation that does not situate his mythic Africadian identity within its founding narrative (Walcott 2003a). This is not only because Clarke’s work opposes racial injustice in contemporary Canada and strives to correct the historical record in order to fashion a more convivial future. It is also because Clarke (2007b) expresses radical nostalgia for the African America of Martin and Malcolm – not just the Canada of Trudeau and Grant – and Odysseys Home (2002, 72, 69n38) casts envious glances towards an African American middle-class that acts as a “privileged Other” for African Canada.

Clarke’s creation of a more powerful African American Other resembles the “Cotswold village populated by Oprah Winfrey, Bill Cosby, Michael Jordan, Terry McMillan, Spike Lee, Michael Jackson, Quincy Jones, Vernon Jordan, and dozens more of their ilk” that constitutes the “slightly romantic view of black America” held by many Black Britons (Gates Jr. 2000, 177). Paul Gilroy (2011, 126) is not amused by such desires, especially when they seem to assume that we should search for the “corporate, multicultural glamour” of a “British Obama” in a similar vein to innately commodified television shows like The X Factor. His work often pays homage to Fanon’s critique of profiteers and schemers and an American society for people of black cultures. For example, he has used polemical language to discuss the “less menacing celebrity ‘half-castes’” who are featured prominently in neocolonial environments that try to pass as post-racial nations (Gilroy 2005, 128). He has also developed a caustic critique of a Black bourgeoisie, which promotes profitable, independent Afrocentric schools that fit neatly within neoliberal visions of market-driven approach to education (Gilroy 1993, 188). Indeed, Gilroy’s recent exploration (2010, 172-3) of the moral economies of Black Atlantic cultures has extended and clarified his commitment to Fanon’s new humanism by critiquing the fantasies of superhuman blackness packaged for middle-class desiring machines, as well as the celebratory narratives of nations and corporations that point to their success in extending political, economic and educational rights to a privileged caste drawn from racial and ethnic minorities.

Although Clarke (2002, 85 n13) may disagree with elements of Gilroy’s position on cultural nationalism, they can both be read as children of Fanon who mourn the demise of a Black public sphere that privileged careful listening, collaborative effort and democratic discussion. Whereas Gilroy (1993, 109) recounted his traumatic experiences at Yale University and the city of New Haven in the early 1990s – when he believed that he had gone to America in search of a musical culture that no longer exists – Clarke (2002, 5) has discussed the shock he experienced on the realization that an African American
“sub-civilization” was “self-absorbed” when he taught at Duke University in the late 1990s. These similar experiences at elite universities in the United States are a testament to their shared yearning for African American cultures of the long sixties that encouraged Black teenagers outside of the United States to dream about a Black, Leftist International, as well as their shared frustration with “post-soul” African Americans who seize Blackness for aggressively nationalistic purposes (Gilroy 1993, 34; Neal 2002, 17).

Such connections between Clarke and Gilroy are often overlooked when Clarke’s excavation of a poly conscious Canada is placed in opposition to Gilroy’s insistence on the double consciousness of a Black Atlantic. Similarly, scholars often emphasize the differences between the African Canadian work of Clarke and Black Canadian Diaspora Studies, “seen in the work of Marlene NourbeSe Philip, Dionne Brand, and Rinaldo Walcott, for example … [which] suggest that various local and national black geographies contribute to the production of space within the [Canadian] nation” (McKittrick 2006, 103). The cartographies of struggle developed by activist-scholars such as Philip (1997) and Brand (2002), hold “place and placenessness in tension, through imagination and materiality, and therefore re-spatialized Canada on what might be considered unfamiliar grounds” (McKittrick 2006, 106). To borrow one of Gilroy’s favourite phrases, it bears repetition that Philip (1997) and other interdisciplinary scholars have developed comparative and transnational analysis of Caribana in Toronto and the Notting Hill carnival in London. This is because the final section of this paper casts Winks, Clarke and Walcott as an unlikely band of brothers who have often been unable, or unwilling, to connect the lived experiences of Blackness in Britain and Canada.

There are significant consequences to work that constructs Black Canada without reference to the lived experiences of Black communities in Britain. In the first place, it cannot develop an effective critique of Winks’s decision to marginalize the connections between Black Canada and Black Britain, as well as British journals and magazines that “gave attention to Canada” (Winks 1997, 352, 382, 481). Furthermore, it can also seem to repeat the charges laid against liberal tokenism in Canada. For example, Odysseys Home (2002, 6-7) challenges Canadian academics who pretend that “Black Canadian literature consists of two or maybe three writers and, if pressed, will struggle to name Austin Clarke and Dionne Brand.” Yet the text does not name any contributors to Black British Cultural Studies other than “luminaries … such as Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall” (Ibid., 49). More disconcertingly, Odysseys Home sometimes fails to reveal a close reading of Hall and Gilroy and omits to mention their extensive work critiquing anti-essentialism in order to argue that they seemed to embark on a mission “to dislodge Black Studies and, by extension, African-American Studies, in the name of a
beautiful anti-essentialism” (Ibid.). In the blunt words of Lucy Evans (2009, 263), Clarke makes sense of Gilroy’s approach by simplifying it.

Rinaldo Walcott’s work engages closely with Hall, Gilroy and “one or two” other figures in Black British Cultural Studies. He has creatively adapted their cultural theories in order to challenge the nation without rejecting it outright (Walcott, 2003a, 22). Moreover, he has shown a clear engagement with terms, like anti-anti-essentialism, which frustrate some readers of Cultural Studies (Hill 1997). However, Walcott (2003a, 32) also places Black Canadian Studies squarely within a North American framework when he replaces the metaphor of ships and docks Gilroy uses for a Black Atlantic culture with the metaphor of jogging for the “overland travel” between Black Canada and African America. In a similar fashion to Clarke – who reads Wayde Compton’s rumination of “what is britannia/to me?” alongside the poetry of African Americans like Countee Cullen, but does not link Compton’s question to Black British poets, such as Jackie Kay, who have engaged with the Harlem Renaissance and British Arts Movement (Clarke 2002, 230) – Walcott has been unable to elucidate a number of his Canadian case studies with empirical evidence from Black Britain. His description of Kardinal Offishal’s “Bakardi Slang”, a seminal piece of Canadian rap music, in which Black Toronto translates hegemonic American phrases so as to cement itself “oppositionally to the nation and still articulate its diaspora connectiveness” (Walcott 2003a, 143), is one prominent example of how his work uses Gilroy’s theories without noting the specific contexts in which they emerged. For while Walcott evokes Gilroy’s language about Smiley Culture – whose first single, “Cockney Translation” (1984), conveys a view of black diasporic and white Cockney languages as “genuinely interchangeable alternatives disrupting the racial hierarchy in which they are usually arranged” (Gilroy 1987, 195-6) – he does not cite how Gilroy developed these ideas with reference to the politics and poetics of everyday life in Black London.

Although Clarke and Walcott sometimes fail to draw on relevant material from Black populations in Europe, they both insist that African Canadian poetics involves the voices of women and men born outside of Canada. For example, Clarke (2009b) provides his readers with enough evidence to suggest that Trey Anthony, a female comedian born in England whose well-known play, Da Kink in My Hair, debuted in the Toronto fringe festival in 2001, can be included to the list of Fanon’s grandchildren who point us beyond liberal lies in the studios, white faces in the boardroom and the magic moments of the long sixties. Similarly, Walcott (2003a) has repeatedly highlighted the importance of writers born in the Caribbean, like Dionne Brand and Sylvia Wynter, to his intellectual project.

Responding to concerns that his own writing evidences elements of a
“masculine global imaginary” (Stephens 2005), Gilroy’s (2011, 23) recent pronouncements about bio-politics also emphasize Sylvia Wynter’s systematization of Fanon’s ideas about epidermalization. In the twenty-first century, he has inserted a number of female athletes into the roll-call of male role models he considered a feature of Afrocentric cultural nationalism in The Black Atlantic (Gilroy 2005, 13-14). This means that he has been able to extend his attack on the revolutionary conservatism of Afrocentricity (1993a, 188, 194; 2000, 206), and taken aim at neoliberal practices that publicize “debased” forms of the Black public sphere. Sometimes this extends his critique of militarized homophilia – the “exultation of war as a space in which men can know themselves better and love one another legitimately in the absence of the feminine” (Gilroy 2000, 146) – to semi-privatized spaces that involve “sport minus weapons.” Indeed, he expresses his discomfort with the “Americo-centric image of the black public sphere recast in the image of an inner-city basketball court” as an “exclusively male stage for the theater and power in which sound is displaced by vision and words are generally second to physical gestures” (Ibid., 186).

Gilroy’s notion of a Black public sphere thus emerges as a historical memory of a diasporic generation that grew up listening to responsible troubadours in the 1960s and 1970s. More pointedly, his description of a soulful Black Atlantic has been critiqued for its elisions and silences as much as its content. According to Clarke, The Black Atlantic situates “U.S definitions at the centre of diasporic African experiences” and treats Black Canada as a “blunt irrelevance” (Clarke 2002, 82, 8). Yet in order to build on Clarke’s intervention we need to talk more, not less, about the similarities and differences between Black Canadian Studies and Black British Studies. After all, Black populations in Europe often constitute a similar position to African Canadians in regards to their experiences in countries that have been racialized as white, their statistical and political presence in the nation, and their engagement with freedom dreams emanating from Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas. In making a case for further work on the comparisons between Black Canada and Black Europe, I am also mindful of Gilroy’s willingness to adapt and rework his position when he is able to hear convincing critiques that relate to his understanding of “soulful” and “post-soulful” cultures (Green and Guillory 1998, 254). This is evident when Against Race (2000, 253, 78) and Darker than Blue (2010, 155-166) repeatedly returned to Fanon’s “precious insights,” and provided a clear response to readers who expressed their surprised that The Black Atlantic said little about Frantz Fanon.

To paraphrase Fanon, Black Canadian Studies is unlikely to animate cultural theorists in the “overdeveloped world” if it is allowed to rot away under carefully constructed commercials – much like those developed by the National Hockey League – that veil the violence of neoliberal professionalism.
Like other intellectuals who fought Nazism in the twentieth century, Fanon could not ignore the perils of authoritarian populism that publicizes images of athletic hyperhumanity, and the biopolitical machinery of a sports and fitness industry that specifies that the person is identified only in terms of the body (Gilroy 2000, 196, 201). In fact, he shared the concerns of Adorno about sporting events that are used to cultivate distraction and hero-worship, and railed against white-collar workers who bet in office pools, and shout from the sidelines, rather than expose themselves to the exertion and discipline demanded of athletes (Fanon 2001, 158, 168; Adorno 1998, 196-7). Nonetheless, the spectral effect of Fanon and other key thinkers of The Black Atlantic, such as C.L.R James (1993), also remind us that the sporting life inspires utopian desires for fully conscious people, full of ideas, who play games as well.

References


**Endnotes**

1 Clairmont and McGill’s *Africville: The Life and Death of a Black Community* (1974) liberally uses the phrase “marginals and transients” to describe Africville, a predominantly African Canadian community in Halifax, Nova Scotia that was bulldozed in the late 1960s. The question used in my title is taken from Clarke (2002, 201). Clarke’s essay, entitled “Treason of the Black Intellectuals?”, adapts the work of Clairmont and McGill in order to reflect on some of the pain he experienced in Halifax during the 1970s and critique Rinaldo Walcott’s use of Black Canadian as a name/metaphor for the rhythms of black migration. It is a wide-ranging essay that involves a discussion of various intellectuals. However, it omits to mention Walcott’s engagement with seminal texts in Cultural Studies, such as *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986, 20), which argue that what is socially peripheral is often symbolically central (also see Babcock 1978, 32; Gates 2000, 171). I allude to these key contributions to Cultural Studies in the subtitle of my essay, as well as Sylvia Wynter’s “The Poetics and the Politics of a High Life for Caliban” (1995), a text that Clarke does engage with in *Odysseys Home* (2002, 130-1).

2 I would like to thank Leanne Taylor, Amoaba Gooden and the anonymous reviewers for the *Southern Journal of Canadian Studies* for their insightful comments and suggestions about earlier drafts of this essay.
Clarke (2002, 21n12) defines liberalism as an ideology that “exalts ‘liberty’, the freedom of the individual, of market equality, small-is-good government, experimentation, and the erosion of prejudice.”

On a “neoliberal revolution” see, for example, Hall (2011) and Grossberg (2010).

For examples of brief, heuristic comments made about Clarke’s non-fiction, see Hudson’s (2008) discussion of Clarke’s essays and bibliographies, Walcott’s (2003a) reading of Clarke’s melancholia, Chariandy’s (2002, 198) “modestly expositional” essay, and McKitrick’s (2006, 100, 105) analysis of Clarke’s desire to list all that is/was/can be Black Canada. The bibliography of articles and theses about Clarke at Athabasca University (http://www2.athabascau.ca/cll/writers/english/writers/geclarke/biblio_by.php) also lists much more work about Clarke the dramatist, poet and librettist than Clarke the cultural critic.

Winks engaged with leading anthropologists and sociologists of the early twentieth century when he pursued his master’s degree in ethnography from the University of Colorado in 1953 (Adrian 2003).

In 1974, shortly after the first publication of The Blacks in Canada, Loyola College and Sir George Williams University would merge and create Concordia University.

According to Freud (1909), family romances were common fantasies in which children replaced one or both of their parents with figures of more renown.

For critiques of Eurocentric approaches to individual uplift that position whites as honest, rational teachers and cast blacks as perpetual students see, for example, Biko (2002), Gordon (1995), Wood (2010).

Clarke places “sic” in square brackets on at least 65 occasions in Odysseys Home.

“it bears repetition” is regularly used by Gilroy. See, for example, Gilroy (1993a, 105, 155, 218, 223; 1997, 24, 32; 2000, 59, 165, 196, 237; 2011, 25, 30). This staple of the lecture hall is not commented upon in the literature about Gilroy’s work. However, it deserves to be studied further in order to engage with work that associates Gilroy to an “Africaphobic”, “Ivory Tower” rather than “African-centred”, “activist-intellectual” work (Christian 2002, 125-6), and contextualise the intellectual projects of scholars more sympathetic to Gilroy’s engagement with concepts in cultural theory, such as performativity and self-fashioning, who do not “read Fanon as though we were about to join him in the trenches of the anti-colonial liberation struggle” (Scott 1999, 199).

For example, Walcott’s work also engages with Kobena Mercer (Walcott 2003a, 17; Chariandy 2002, 205).