



## **Afroperipheral indigeneity in Wayde Compton's *The Outer Harbour***

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### **ABSTRACT**

Black Canadian writer Wayde Compton's short story collection *The Outer Harbour* (2015) is located in the Afroperiphery of British Columbia which stands as a 'contact zone' that enables the alliances between Black and Indigenous peoples and also establishes a fecund ground of possibilities to emphasize the way in which cross-ethnic coalitions and representations reconsider imperial encounters previously ignored. The stories participate in the recent turn in Indigenous studies towards kinship and cross-ethnicity to map out the connected and shared itineraries of Black and Indigenous peoples and re-read Indigeneity in interaction. At the same time, the stories offer a fresh way to revisit Indigeneity in Canada through the collaborative lens and perspective of the Afroperipheral reality. In doing so, they contribute to calling attention to current cross-ethnic struggles for Indigenous rights and sovereignty in Canada that rely on kinship and ethnic alliances to keep on interrogating the shortcomings of the nation's multiculturalism.

**KEYWORDS:** Indigeneity; Afroperipheralism; Cross-ethnicity; Kinship; Multiculturalism; Sovereignty.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Black Canadian writer Wayde Compton offers a fresh voice to Canadian literary studies since he has originally exposed a singular way to rethink the representation of British Columbian populations. Compton's work – two volumes of poetry and a collection of short stories- veers from the Eastern Canadian lens and conceives a circumatlantic model of exposing Blackness and a Black Pacific Rim perspective as a way to think "outside the diasporic master narratives" (Compton, 2010: 14) that have resulted from the Black Atlantic perspective.

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His oeuvre, then, “manages to reconcile the apparently antithetical pulls of regionalism and diaspora, and maps out the connected itineraries of diverse peoples both within the Pacific board of North America and across the Pacific Ocean” (Cuder-Domínguez, 2017: 200).

Rejecting the redemptive drive of Afrocentrism, Compton opts for embracing uncommon Black experiences through “an assertive Afroperipheralism” (Compton, 2010: 15) that not only revisits the “northern actuality” but also charts Western Canada -where “unusual black experiences” are celebrated vis-à-vis “Indigenous and Asian minorities” (Compton, 2010: 14)- as the site where the symbolic legacies of the Black Atlantic can be applied to the Black Pacific by being remixed with First Nations’ commonalities. In this sense, Heather Smyth explains that “the term ‘Black Pacific’ alludes to the unexpected cultural connections and commitments we can witness when diasporas grow in their respective locations” (Smyth, 2014: 390). Thus, for the British Columbian writer the Black Pacific, or the place where Afroperipheralism is accommodated, becomes the perfect site to represent and negotiate “ambiguous relationships with local criollo and Indigenous culture and with the Black Atlantic itself”, as Heidi Carolyn Feldman notes (Feldman, 2006: 7).

Indeed, far from studying the presence of Black peoples in Western Canada in isolation, Compton establishes the connection of Blackness in interaction with other erased histories. As Pilar Cuder-Domínguez rightly asserts, his work leads to create a “symbolic construction of a (re)imagined Pacific community built on shared histories” (Cuder, 2017: 200), especially with Indigenous populations. Accordingly, through the “oblique kinds of blackness” (Compton, 2010: 13) that spring up from Western Canada, Compton envisions a cross-ethnic reading of Indigeneity that transcends the “outer rim of black centres” (Compton, 2010: 14) to retell Indigenous subjectivity within a new national, political, cultural, and aesthetic context and tradition. Hence, Afroperipheralism appears allied with the recognition of the Indigenous presence in Western Canada. In this light, and following Indigenous scholar Keavy Martin, we can see how such periphery offers an alternative possibility “to honor the diversity within their nations and literatures” (Martin, 2012: 47). Therefore, Compton’s Afroperiphery stands as a ‘contact zone’ that not only enables the alliances between Black and Indigenous peoples but also establishes a fecund ground of possibilities to emphasize the way in which these cross-ethnic coalitions and representations reconsider imperial encounters previously ignored and show the way in which marginalized subjectivities “are constituted in and by their relations to each other”, as Mary Louise Pratt explains (Pratt, 2008: 8). The cross-ethnic approach is suitable here since it both captures the crucial idea of “crossing” ethnic boundaries “and, more importantly, suggests a problematization of the term ‘ethnic’ while not erasing the concept altogether” (Simal González, 2011: 34). Cross-ethnicity fosters the questioning of cultural concepts such as identity and belonging and brings to the fore the capacity to rethink the historical presence of Indigenous peoples because it “suggests a revisionist agenda, and keeps ethnicity as a central, if disputed, category” (Simal González, 2011: 35), a move that fits in the

representation of the shared complicities between Indigenous people and Blacks in Western Canada as suggested in Compton's collection of short stories *The Outer Harbour* (2015).

Therefore, this collection of stories also explores a current and controversial trend that aims to keep on questioning the racializing constructs under way in Canada: the recent coinage of 'Aboriginal blackness' or 'Indigenous Blacks', minted by George Elliott Clarke (Clarke, 2011: 400). Clarke's rethinking of Black Canadianness has evolved to embrace the hybridity that accompanies the shared experience and attachment to Indigenous territory. In this way, such shift in the recognition of a cross-ethnic and hybrid identity of Indigenous peoples not only represents a common thread that runs through Compton's collection but also offers a fresh viewpoint that accentuates the intrinsic potential of cross-ethnicity or else "the futility of pinning identity to race while opening new possibilities for collaboration across racial and ethnic boundaries" (Fraile-Marcos, 2018: 185), as Ana María Fraile-Marcos fittingly contends.

On this ground, Compton's *The Outer Harbour* proffers this cross-ethnic Afroperipheralism as a new path to explore what Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey has aptly described as "the complex and shifting entanglement between sea and land, Black diaspora and Indigeneity, and routes and roots" (DeLoughrey, 2009: 2). Also, it allows for a global and interconnected reading of Indigeneity out of the stifling lens of what Daniel Coleman (2006) calls 'white civility'. Coleman holds that the historical project underneath the construction of Canadian identity has relied on an exclusionary paradigm of civility that classifies "a diverse population around the standardizing ideals of whiteness, masculinity and Britishness" (Coleman, 2006: 10)<sup>1</sup>. In tune with Indigenous thought, Coleman defends a cross-ethnic mode of civility –similar to the one purveyed in Compton's stories- that needs to "disavow the literal and cultural genocide practiced against Indigenous peoples that constitutes the foundation of White invader-settler culture, and it needs to disavow the ongoing, racialized violence that has maintained White supremacy in the positions of control and power in Canada" (Coleman, 2008: 222). Concordant with Coleman's assertion, Native Canadian scholar Lee Maracle also points to shared complicities through a cross-ethnic approach to Canadianness solely to disprove the fallacious belief that Canadian "cultural foundations are British" (Maracle, 2017: 26) and to, contrarily, submit that, as Compton's *The Outer Harbour* also implies, "Canada was once Indigenous" (Maracle, 2017: 26).

In tune with this cross-ethnic paradigm to reinterpret Indigeneity which as of late has become a trend in Canadian literature (Justice, 2008; Talaga, 2018; Reader & McCall, 2020), this essay stems from and participates in the current turn in Indigenous criticism towards "Indigenous epistemologies based on the notion of kinship" (Fraile, 2020: 126) and considers Compton's collection of short stories fully entrenched within this train of "epistemologies that interact fruitfully with one another and work toward the decolonization of knowledge and power" (Fraile-Marcos, 2020: 126). Thus, and following such cross-ethnic kinships that inform a new way of reading and understanding Indigeneity in Canada, I aim to focus on how the Indigenous presence is stressed and appraised in the Afroperipheral canvas of *The Outer*

*Harbour*. As it has been duly marked, in this short story collection “Indigenous populations receive more prominent attention than before in Compton’s *oeuvre*” (Cuder-Domínguez, 2017: 210). As the title of Compton’s collection premises, the Indigenous entities in the stories are unrelentingly attached to the land and its recovery. This is why Vancouver is central in the overall imagery of the collection. At the core of Compton’s stories lies the fact that the Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest Coast are the original inhabitants of what is nowadays known as Vancouver. Before the arrival of the European explorations in the 18th century, the Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, Musqueam (Xw'muthk'i'um), Tsawwassen and Coquitlam (Kwayhquitlam) were established in the North West Coast of Canada.

In light of this, several stories feature the *terra nova* of a volcanic island situated in Vancouver’s outer harbor -renamed Pauline Johnson Island after the Mohawk writer who reindigenized Vancouver in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century- which will be thoroughly claimed by Indigenous activists and friends in some tales of the volume. This new reading of the land permeates the collection and indigenizes the Afroperipheral Pacific framework. In this regard, Compton’s stories partake in the ongoing kinship paradigm by revisiting Indigeneity aligned with Blackness in the Canadian Afroperiphery, “where radical experiments of identity can be tried” (Compton, 2010: 13), thus mapping out the connected itineraries of Black, Indigenous and mixed-race peoples both within the Pacific board of North America and across the Pacific Ocean. Accordingly, in what follows I will explain how the collection rereads and reclaims Indigenous subjectivities in interaction -through cross-ethnicity and its kinship modes of relation- as a fresh and feasible way to question the ideological tenets of the Canadian multiculturalism. In so doing, I will argue that Compton’s literary output contributes to Clarke’s recent and transgressive concept of “Indigenous Blacks”, that is the collaboration of Blacks and Indigenous peoples within the reassessment of Canadian experience as a transversal ontological reality that defends a shared sense of sovereignty. Accordingly, the collection also participates in asserting the recognition of Indigenous ‘intellectual sovereignty’ through notions of cross-ethnic kinship, following current trends in Indigenous claims made by Native Canadian thinkers such as Lee Maracle, Daniel Heath Justice, or Leanne B. Simpson. In this way, Compton’s collection offers a new approach to reclaim the Indigenous presence in Canada from its foundation to the present by breaking the Gordian knot of an outdated nationalism. The book also plays its part in calling attention to current cross-ethnic struggles for Indigenous rights and sovereignty in Canada.

## 2. AFROPERIPHERAL INDIGENEITY IN *THE OUTER HARBOUR*

The stories that comprise *The Outer Harbour* revolve around the concept of place and identity, two major axes that are deeply ingrained in the ongoing negotiation of what it means to be Canadian. Yet, the title of the collection offers a decisive point of reference to invite a specific reading of the stories focusing on the boisterous nature attached to identity and belonging from the Canadian periphery. Indeed, the title points to Vancouver -the fringe where the stories are centered- as Canada's entrance to the Pacific and makes an implied allusion to George Vancouver's idea of settlement by effacing the Indigenous presence. In doing so, the stories validate the questioning of Canadian colonialism and attend to destabilize the foundational terms in which the nation-state is premised by shaking the assumed image of Canada as a multicultural mosaic of ethnicities. As Smaro Kamboureli explains, the Multiculturalism Act (also known as Bill C-93), passed in 1988 and entrenched in the Charter of Rights (1982), "recognizes the cultural diversity that constitutes Canada, but it does so by practicing a sedative politics, a politics that attempts to recognize ethnic differences, but only in a contained fashion, in order to manage them" (Kamboureli, 2008: 82). That is, the multicultural reality is only tolerated "without disturbing the conventional articulation of the Canadian dominant society" (Kamboureli 2008, 82). Compton's collection displays the fallacious nature of the boasted Canadian multiculturalism through a cross-ethnic allegiance between Indigeneity and Black peoples that reclaim the erased stories of Western Canada.

In his book *Plural Sovereignties and Contemporary Indigenous Literature* Stuart Christie states that

[i]t is a commonplace that the nationalization of Indigenous cultural assets by Anglo-European North America across the past century has consisted of an ideological...occupation. Yet by seeking to channel individual indigenous aspirations through assimilation, this Anglo-European occupation (called the "American" or "Canadian" nation) has in many cases achieved effects opposite to what was desired. (Christie, 2009: 2)

As a result, in their ongoing battle against the Anglo-European occupation, Christie further explains, Indigenous people have modelled a "modality, to turn an old phrase of Stuart Hall's, through which the contemporary experience—and vitality—of Indigenous sovereignty is lived" (Christie, 2009: 2). Therefore, "this contest between competing sovereignties and cultural values has produced a plurality in the contemporary indigenous imagining" (Christie, 2009: 2). This plurality that links territory to identity has therefore been enlarged to embrace "geographies of kinship", to paraphrase Tavleen Purewal (2019: 53), between Indigeneity and other ethnic communities in Canada. Literary criticism in Canada has built upon this plurality and coalitions by revisiting the legacy of decolonization as purveyed by the postcolonial

theoretical framework. Dene scholar Glen Coulthard's groundbreaking book *Red Skin, White Masks* (2014) took Indigenous studies by storm because it used Fanon's theories of decolonization in Africa and applied them to the North American context in order to enunciate new and collaborative directions between Indigenous and Black peoples in their fight for the articulation of self-determining goals and a sense of being. In the enduring process of reigniting these collaborative endeavors, Rita Wong has come up with the term "(un)settler" to refer to racialized Canadians who also hold a fraught position in Canada but are willing to embrace the Indigenous' claims. Black Canadian scholar Karina Vernon (2004) has also studied the '(un)settler' positions of the African diaspora in Canada and their role as settlers in the Canadian prairies with the subsequent denial of the rights of Indigenous populations. In this light, other Black Canadian writers and scholars like M. NourbeSe Philip (2017) or David Chariandy (2020) have followed suit and have deepened in the conflicting role of racialized (un)settlers proposing an allegiance between Indigenous and Blacks as the way to nurture the collective practice of articulating a better "postcolonial society" that loosens the grips of "colonial mentality and structures" (Battiste, 2004: 212) to fully reactivate the process of self-assertion.

In this very context, such anticolonial coalition that surfaces out of new theorizations of postcolonial studies has fostered cross-ethnic kinship as an act of cultural resistance. In a political momentum in which the cross-ethnic but Native-based movement Idle No More has demanded "new pathways to assert their rights in the face of the state's continued drive to harmonize Indigenous rights, title, land, and governance with Crown sovereignty" (McCall, 2016: 178), Daniel Heath Justice defends that "the continuity of Indigeneity depends on this methodology of kinship, which suggests kinship is future oriented" (Justice, 2008: 150). Justice also endorses this "kinship criticism" (2008, 159) within Indigenous studies as "the intellectual praxis of holding different histories and contexts of thought together" (Justice, 2008: 159). Hence, kinship, or the cross-ethnic allegiance approach to Indigenous' fight for recognition, has emerged both as a method and a possibility to reclaim and vindicate a plural "Indigenous sovereign space that refuses to operate under the colonial territorialization of ancestral lands" (Purewal 2019: 55). In this way, the collection is inscribed in Leanne B. Simpson's Indigenous plea: "land must once again become the pedagogy" (Simpson, 2014: 7), and offers these cross-ethnic affiliations as a way to outwork the colonial institutionalizing of territory through a new and collaborative side to Indigeneity. In this turn towards cross-ethnic kinship Simpson calls for a collaborative resistance to form "constellations of coresistance" (Simpson, 2017: 9). Accordingly, the coalition between Native Canadians and African Canadians, as excluded citizens in Canadian history, exemplify the intrinsic potential of this cross-ethnic attempt to restore their national attachment and representation. Moreover, Compton prompts Black and racialized subjects to join and claim Indigenous peoples and their ancestral presence and rights.

Consequently, *The Outer Harbour* contributes to this current cross-ethnic kinship approach by placing in the Canadian periphery the fight and coalition between Black '(un)settlers' and Indigenous peoples. In so doing, the collection places the appraisal of Indigenous in/visibility from the outset offering the readers "a remainder that Vancouver is built on what remains to date unceded First Nations territory" (Cuder-Domínguez, 2017: 210). As a primary hint, the collection opens with an epigraph citing Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, a move that deliberately links the alluded politics of space and belonging to the immateriality of dreaming and hoping for the construction of a house able to truly accommodate multiple subjectivities to realize the desired "dream of ownership" (Compton, 2015: 9). Simply, a house –the Canadian realm- that is "considered convenient, comfortable, healthy, sound, desirable, by other people" (Compton, 2015: 9). These words by Bachelard not only open the collection but also frame the nature of the stories and act as the abode where the different characters transpose their different "geographies of connection" (Cuder-Domínguez, 2017: 210) and insist on the cross-ethnic kinship approach to rehabilitate the history of First Nations in Canada.

In this light, the first story, "1,360 ft<sup>3</sup> (38.5 m<sup>3</sup>)", plays with the intersecting thrusts of place, belonging, identity, and race within the restricted space of an apartment. In it, different subjectivities aim to redefine the space by using drugs as a means to escape from reality. Hence, Riel, a Black student whose mixed-race origin troubles his sense of being, Kelly and Erika, middle-class white students of educated parents, and Frances, "a proud urban Cree" (Compton, 2015: 12), bring the so-called Canadian mosaic to the restricted locus of a shared apartment. This place turns into a parallel image of Canada and establishes their interconnection by shedding light to many of their existential concerns, namely the discovery of an undocumented immigrant found in a container in the harbor. Accordingly, the story begins with the defining sentence: "It is as if the apartment has become its own culture" (Compton, 2015: 17). The interconnection of the protagonists is thus based on racial signs and on immigration concerns, two key issues that interrogate the image of the pleaded Canadian cultural mosaic as the epitome of a national identity. This boasted multiculturalism that has become an asset to Canada's national identity is precisely questioned from the very first story of the collection. Riel Graham, a mixed-race Canadian, transcends what Lawrence Hill coined as 'zebra poetics' to embrace Indigenous alliances and connections. Hill's 'zebra poetics' points to surpass the binary reading of Black and White subjectivity by adopting the symbol of the zebra in order to "repudiate the perilous notion of a univocal aesthetics of blackness" (Clarke, 2002: 232). In Riel's case, the cross-ethnic connection between Blackness and Indigeneity is noted by his own name which evokes the famous Métis leader and revolutionary activist Louis Riel. Through his cross-ethnic alliance the story exposes the ways in which the overlapping realities and identities of Indigenous and Blacks have been misrepresented in Western Canada. As Riel himself requests: "Where does one end and the other begin?" (Compton, 2015: 18). This delegitimizing move is all the more congruous when the

undocumented girl is found and Riel gets in contact with her. The supposed disappearance of the girl, called Versajna, echoes the ceaseless disappearance of Indigenous girls and women in Canada and the subsequent violence that comes with it. Riel's and the girl's ethnicity hint at the equal difficulty to accommodate undocumented immigrants, Black, mixed-race and Indigenous subjectivities to the Canadian mosaic in full comfort: "She looks, as they say, maybe Asian, maybe Middle Eastern. It's hard to tell. Riel himself is used to being misrecognized" (Compton, 2015: 18). This unifying misrecognition forges the allegiance of overlooked ethnicities perceived "like ghosts among the living" (Compton, 2015: 19) in the multicultural discourse of the nation. In this sense, Srikanth has studied how the Indigenous Canadians' reply to the Multiculturalism Act is premised on the "belie[f] that multiculturalism only gives formal recognition to pluralities" (Srikanth, 2010: 19) and has been used as "a ploy to deny special status to the aboriginal peoples and pit other citizens against the indigenous people" (Srikanth, 2010: 19). In response to that, the story validates the kinship approach and presents the multiethnic apartment – that stands as a real mosaic- as an "esoteric Charter of Rights and Freedoms" (Compton, 2015: 19) of sorts. The irony of it all, which deepens the critique to Canadian multiculturalism, is that Versajna is a Canadian national passing as an undocumented refugee in order to draw attention to the crevices of the Canadian asylum policies and the so-called sedative politics of a nation that has historically blotted out the presence and alliances of Indigenous peoples. Versajana's story also manifests the shortcomings of hegemonic expectations about race in Canada or, ultimately, "how expectations shaped perceptions" (Compton, 2015: 22). Riel finally accepts his own reality alongside the cross-ethnic partnership established in his locale against the backdrop of Canadian policies and winds up mocking the cultural tenets and supposed historical references that have shut out Indigeneity: "First Corinthians, remember? Evil company corrupts good morals...Riel feels for a moment like Galileo...[o]r whatever the fuck it was he did to make the church burn him at the stake. Or was that Joan of Arc?" (Compton, 2015: 26, 27). At the dawning of a new millennium, and whilst the September 11 terrorist attacks are broadcast on TV, Riel decides to eschew bigotry and monoculturalism and decides to focus on a cross-ethnic mode of representing Indigeneity and Blackness out of the threshold of Western imagination. As the story finally apprises, this is the way in which "[h]e is commuting to the future" (Compton, 2015: 30) since, in his alternative reality to reject Canadian white civility, he chooses optimism and cross-ethnic connections to reclaim a real multicultural Canada: "*Eppur si muove*" (Compton, 2015: 30).

Canada's double-edged multiculturalism is all the more evident in the second story titled "The Lost Island". This story sets the trope of Pauline Johnson Island as the definite trait that runs through the following chapters and permeates the whole collection. The story talks about the ongoing fight to claim Pauline Johnson Island by some Indigenous activists. Hence, at the core of the story is the reclamation of Indigenous sovereignty in Canada since, as Lee Maracle

expresses, “[w]hen the phrase ‘land claims’ is used, images of Indigenous people pop up” (Maracle, 2015: 78). Moreover, the fact that this land formation is named after the iconic Mohawk poet Pauline Johnson evinces the aim of a cultural amendment and offers the possibility to display another disenfranchisement on the part of the Canadian state by “declar[ing] the island a restricted ecological reserve” (Compton, 2015: 36). The story responds to the nation’s sedative politics and also tackles current issues in Indigenous Canadian political discourse and claims, especially present when the island’s English name Pauline Johnson is imposed over her Mohawk one, Tekahionwake. This colonial appropriation is battled by the Indigenous activists who will occupy the isle and will turn it in a condo tower from where to overlook the entire city and, in the end, will transform it into a center for a group of undocumented immigrants. Thereby, the story focuses on Indigenous entreaties and takes up a series of political issues that “mirror the zigzagging interconnections between current discourses on the environment: white settler entitlement, Canadian racialization and racism, technology, biopolitics, surveillance and security, human rights, and asylum policies” (Fraile-Marcos, 2018: 185). The island is composed as a rebirth of a myth of origins where Indigeneity takes center stage following the Indigenous’ train of thought that “mythologies contains truth” (Maracle 2017, 58). So, taking into consideration that “[m]ost Canadians think mythologies are false, are fiction, but as all writers know, fiction is often the source of profound truth” (Maracle, 2017: 58), the island stands as the locus where authentic cross-ethnic coalitions appear legitimized. Jean, a “pretty much black” (Compton, 2015: 34) woman, allies with the Indigenous activists even though she sincerely confesses; “I’m not Native” (35), that is, she represents the ‘(un)settler’ in favor of Indigenous rights. This cross-ethnic partnership reclaims the ‘geographies of connection’ as the means to fight culturally against historical colonization following Simpson’s defense of cross-ethnic political unity: “intelligence is diversity” (Simpson, 2014: 16). The mentioned partnership also echoes the real movement Idle No More which “has rendered more visible direct, collective action in asserting land and governance rights irrespective of governmental forms of recognition” (McCall, 2016: 185).

In tune with it, Jean openly avows to her Indigenous colleagues: “This new land is yours. You’ve never had it, but we’re going to give it back to you” (Compton, 2015: 39). What really shimmers underneath the ethos of the story is the ongoing fight for the recognition of Indigenous sovereignty evoked in Maracle’s rhetorical question: “how did our land get to be a country called Canada without our consent?” (Maracle, 2017: 9). Through the trope of the volcano, the tale intervenes in the multicultural discourse by figuring an *island* that praises kinship connections and accommodates the cross-ethnic subjectivities of Indigenous and Black Canadians from the trap of the sedative politics -or from being “pre-emptively estranged” (Compton, 2015: 73)- to a united representation of inclusion and belonging. This cross-ethnic collaboration to reclaim the land acts as an authorizing move that functions as a remainder of the fact that “Stolen First Nations resources and African slave labor together built up the wealth

of modern Western Europe and the Americas, especially its northern reaches” (Clarke, 2011: 404).

In his endeavor to build on cross-cultural bonds and in line with the turn to kinship modes of relation, Compton also revisits the postcolonial theoretical legacy by indigenizing a common trope famously coined in the postcolonial momentum that became paradigmatic to contest, or even subvert, the idea of the North American melting pot. Precisely, the metaphor of the volcano became popular in the classic postcolonial novel *Rolling the R's* by R. Zamora Linmark. In it, the Filipino American writer exposed a witty critique to the shortcomings that have historically accompanied the cultural encounters in North America and how the difficulties to embrace different epistemologies have been swept under the choked tropes of the melting pot or the cultural mosaic for that matter. In *Rolling the R's* the Filipino migrants notice such shortfalls and use the volcanoes of the Caribbean –where they landed- to disrupt the trodden trope of the perfect mixing: “The ground you standing is not the freakin’ meltin’ pot but one volcano. And one day, the thing goin’ erupt and you guys goin’ be the first ones for burn” (Linmark, {1997} 2016: 84). Such fiery frame of mind is revamped in the activists that hold a revolutionary intention to protect the Island as a First Nations’ cultural treasure in Compton’s story: “The plan they had was not books, not theories, but action, risk, transmutation...something worth eruption. Something to capsize for” (Compton, 2015: 37). This decisive ambition correlates with the redemptive drive to protect the nature and ecological resources deeply attached to Indigenous claims and the security of the *island*. The response is that Jean and the Indigenous activists are made illegal –dehumanized, again- because they are accused of occupying the island: “Being people where they shouldn’t be” (Compton, 2015: 43). With this, Compton underlines the Canadian exclusionary attitude and chronicled trampling of Indigenous historical rights which, in this case, also apply to the shared experiences of Black Canadians in Western Canada. If, drawing on Frantz Fanon’s theories of decolonization, Glen Coulthard proposed “self-recognition” on the part of Indigenous’ and racialized peoples to destabilize the country’s sedative politics, Lee Maracle builds upon such fanonian inspiration and adds up to Coulthard’s assertion to reclaim “co-optation ... and the challenge of creating relations of affiliation” (McCall, 2016: 179), thus fostering the aforementioned cross-ethnic kinship discourse to pursue to restoration of the Indigenous’ presence in Canada. Following this train of thought, Compton’s scathing sense of humor blends the stories of First Nations and Black peoples through the transboundary dynamics of geographies, and histories and insists on the value of “sharing the liberatory politics of Indigenous peoples and other communities of struggle who have also been forced to live through oppression”, as Leanne B. Simpson also defends (Simpson, 2016: 16). In this process, he eschews the Canadian project of white civility in favor of the kinship paradigm by coupling the legacy of colonialism with global practices of capitalization and deterritorialization. This can be observed in his fiction –the activists in the collection- as well as in its echoes in real

life –as the movements Occupy Vancouver, Idle No More or No One is Illegal demonstrate. Simply by “standing, walking, waiting, thinking, peopling it [the island]” (Compton, 2015: 43) the cross-ethnic activists neglect the Canadian policies of colonialism and alienation and prompt the necessary discussion over citizenship rights and “land dispossession” (Simpson, 2014: 21). Likewise, under “an eruptive volcano” (Linmark, {1997} 2016: 35), the activists, just as the cornered subjects in *Rolling the R's*, demonstrate that “the pot is not melting: it is boiling over with segregation and cultural dismissal of others” (Maracle, 2017: 29).

In the volcanic island, life continues with the alliance of Indigenous and Blacks because Jean gets pregnant from an Indigenous man by the end of the tale. The mixed-race child will be “the seed that drifts over on the wind” (Compton, 2015: 38) and, most importantly, will bring to life the Indigenous motto that pervades in the island: “bodies made out of bodies and carrying forth the bodies of the past” (Compton, 2015: 40). The newborn child will not only institute the “Aboriginal admixture” (Clarke, 2011: 402) as a sign of resistance and survival but also a different way of being Canadian through the productive means of a “potential alliance” (Clarke, 2011: 403) which dismisses “progressive disjuncture” (Compton 2003) and fosters “relations of trust, care, recognition” through this reading of cross-ethnicity, as Toby Rollo (2014, 232) entails for political struggle in his article “Mandates of the State: Canadian Sovereignty, Democracy, and Indigenous Claim”. In this way, the story renovates the revision of postcolonialism through the representation of mixed-race subjectivities<sup>2</sup> and pays homage to the continuous fight for survival and recognition that unites Indigeneity and Blackness aiming for “the reconstruction of a new order of internal culture and a relationship that transcends colonial thought and practice” (Armstrong, 2005: 183). This message, thus, echoes George Elliott Clarke’s powerful statement of cross-ethnic unity in his minting of ‘Indigenous Blacks’: “no African Canadian community may properly thrive until we have understood and embraced the Indigenous People and their campaigns for justice, and that we champion these struggles as our very own” (Clarke, 2011: 404). Further, the tale sets forth “a new ecology on Canadian soil” through a new reading of Blackness that is “Indigenized by mingling with First Nations” (Fraile-Marcos, 2018: 185) as a way to challenge the concept of Canadianness getting over racial lines that separate and opting, conversely, for the celebration of cross-ethnic commonalities that signify respect and acknowledgement within difference.

Jean’s Red-Black child, to use Mills-Proctor’s designation, represents the future despite being unrelentingly attached to the killing of the forefather, the Indigenous activist Fletcher Sylvester, at the hands of Canadian policies. Indeed, Fletcher’s expiatory death will haunt the collection throughout. In the chapter “The Boom” his death is definitely entreated to reveal “yet another example of Canada’s silencing of Indigenous dissent through police murder and violence” (Compton, 2015: 103). The story is creatively made up of flyers filled with information and political messages that commemorate and report Fletcher’s death. Ultimately, the chapter is a political complaint against the eventual transformation of the island into a rezoning of a former ecological locale now turned into a clump of towers and buildings that

perform ‘the estate boom’ that shunned the ecological concerns of activists. Again, the tale unmasks Canadian “policies [that] appear to respond to Indigenous demands but serve a neoliberal welfare state agenda and, as a result, their effects often run in opposition to meaningful autonomy for Indigenous peoples” as Fiona MacDonald has studied (2011, 257). It comes as no surprise that, to the dismay of Indigenous people, the flyer advocates for the neoliberal dream of urban Canada as a blending of “the pioneer spirit of Canada’s heritage with the 21<sup>st</sup> century bravado” (Compton, 2015: 109). The echoes of the aforesaid organizations are again heard since the neoliberal ethos of the demand and its economic ordeals realign the urban social order and destroy the dream of an island devoted to preserve ecology and cross-ethnic understanding. With this literary exercise, Compton also shows how the “uneasy relationship between Indigenous rights and corporate rights in an age of global capitalist -“development”- continues to create deeper points of fracture in these debate” (McCall, 2016: 178) and, at the same time, concurs with the idea that “Indigenous social movements... challenge the model of citizenship put forward by welfare liberalism and the various forms of state intervention this model endorses” (MacDonald 2011, 261).

So, the tower that was once created to control the island’s well-being has now fallen into “the foundations of capitalist imperialism” (Maracle, 2017: 47) to epitomize the infamous policies historically implemented to control immigration in North America. The island is transmuted into “an immigration detention centre, referencing the historical use of islands in North America for immigration control and quarantine” (Cuder-Domínguez, 2017: 211). With this move Compton illustrates the foundations of the colonial relations established in North America, equally damaging for Indigenous people in the US and Canada, and corroborates Lee Maracle’s eloquent statement: “Canadians continue to insist that they are ‘better than America’. There is the myth of the nice Canadians, the just society; meanwhile, underneath is all this falsehood” (Maracle, 2017: 50).

Compton’s creative response to the maladies of the colonial policies implemented by the Canadian government(s) means turning to a speculative future that bitterly builds upon the problems of the oppressive present. In this way, the last story of the collection, “The Outer Harbour”, puts together the different threads scattered in preceding stories. The spectrality of Indigenous’ ghosts -a missing girl’s and Fletcher’s- besets the whole story and, therefore, encapsulates the rundown terms of the whole collection. Just as Fletcher’s death, a girl’s eerie death in the former tower transformed into “Island Special Detention Facility” (Compton, 2015: 178) is subjected to the depreciation of Indigenous’ rights in Canada as well as the conflicting nature of its immigration policies. Certainly, Pauline Johnson Island eventually becomes a futuristic ground where the ghosts of First Nations and excluded subjectivities that “have failed to make the cut for meaningful citizenship” (Cuder-Domínguez, 2017: 212) coexist to bear testimony of Canada’s real outcome of the multicultural misperception.

Besieged by Fletcher and the girl's ghosts, the unidentified immigrants that people the detention island create a new way of inhabiting the space by developing an original way of moving around through teletransportation. In so doing, these new subjectivities rebuke the imposed biopolitical control and the economic experimentation that pervades the island. Interestingly, both the girl and Fletcher speak the same language and can be understood by the undocumented subjects now transformed into holograms that exceed the limits of the humans and rely on the domain of the posthuman to call to mind the unresolved claims of Indigenous rights. By blurring the ethnicity of the holograms and stressing the ghosts' Indigeneity, Compton charts the story with Indigenous claims for resistance and justice. A sense of justice that, being Indigenous-themed, as Daniel Heath Justice requests, is intent on extending "recognition to other sovereignties" (Justice, 2006: 24). This move banks on Gerald Vizenor's definition of Indigenous *survivance* as "an active sense of presence" (Vizenor, 1999: vii) that privileges Native-themed stories as "renunciations of dominance" (Vizenor, 1999: vii)<sup>3</sup>. Consistent with this, the story continues to foster cross-ethnic kinship and alliances as the feasible way to challenge exclusionary policies when the ghosts aim to rescue someone whose Blackness is more than implied (Compton, 2015: 178) and is referred to as "it's one of us" (Compton, 2015: 178). Thus, "The Outer Harbour" condenses the different themes and tropes spread throughout the whole collection since "[i]n the setting of Vancouver and the larger context of Canada, the ghosts of the hologram composite, the immigrant girl and the insurgent represent the unsolved issues of Indigenous rights, immigrant and refugee policies, and the challenge to use new (bio)technologies in a responsible and just way" (Fraile-Marcos, 2018: 189). The collection ends reclaiming, again, the cooperation between excluded subjectivities and imagining a new dawn for the Canadian multicultural ethos with the yearned expectation to make "plans to rendezvous with those yet to come" because only this way will they be able to truly "discuss what it means to regroup" (Compton, 2015: 194). This last message is rendered as the takeaway of the collection and lays open the fact that what was heard and realized, the Multicultural policies that exult recognition and respect would be altogether accomplished and the Indigenous presence and importance in Canada would find its overdue legitimacy.

### 3. CONCLUSION

The stories that comprise *The Outer Harbour* offer a fresh point of departure to reconsider new approaches to reclaim Indigenous representation and sovereignty. By inventing counter-realities that amalgamate in the periphery of Western Canada, surpassing and subverting the limits of space and time, Compton proposes a different mode to read the foundational ground upon which Canada has erected a specific, and white, identity. Most importantly, the Indigenous-themed collection offers the chance to (re)interpret Indigeneity through more varied ethnic lenses and puts forth the possibility of considering a bold and complex cosmology of cross-ethnic kinship in the rethinking of Canadian identity. In the wake

of a kinship approach to Indigeneity in Canadian literature and culture, the stories offer a celebrated alliance between Black and Indigenous characters that emerges from the Afroperipheral space of the Canadian West to voice the different sociohistorical claims that these new “transgressive ontologies” (Fraile-Marcos, 2018: 193) demand for justice, in Daniel Heath Justice’s terms. The stories’ core charts a connected discourse with Indigenous criticism and, to paraphrase Justice, contributes to open up “a dialogue that [...] forges and develops important intellectual and interpersonal relationships, and rethinks established and too often myopic creeds without silencing diverse voices, perspectives, or ways of knowing” (Justice, 2012: 48).

By focusing on the requirement of a “Pan-Indigenous Territory” (Compton, 2015: 40), the stories extend a divergent account of the different historical continuums that have deprived First Nations and Black peoples of their rights as citizens: European Canadian colonization, the usurpation of Indigenous’ rights or immigration policies. Thus, *The Outer Harbour*’s cross-ethnic nature disclaims the Canadian sedative politics that have overlooked the alleged mosaic and have read multiculturalism and its refashioning of ethnicities as “palatable to the dominant society” (Kamboureli, 2008: 102). In this sense, the stories that comprise the collection become complicit with the Indigenous kinship claim since they turn into “stories that are unruly, that do not fit” (Martin 2012, 47). Also, the collection expands the realities of the past and present into a speculative future in which current concerns such as the problematization of asylum seekers and refugee policies also take center stage to showcase what is to come and who might, again, be the victims of oppression. In such a move, Compton’s stories act as cautionary tales and tackle issues of current concern that not only generate empathy but also charge a shared history of dispossession and the pervasive racial construct of the nation.

*The Outer Harbour* encompasses cultural interactions –“the accountable kinship within a constitutive matrix” (Justice, 2012: 51)- and presents different tropes within the tradition of Indigenous writing alongside diverse topoi of Black Canadian literature to assemble an interesting and evocative way of recommending cross-ethnic kinship as a feasible way to balance the fight for justice and reconciliation. Fittingly, the stories offer this fresh way to read Indigeneity in Canada through the collaborative lens and perspective of the Afroperipheral reality where “radical experiments of identity can be tried” (Compton, 2010: 13). In this way, the shortcomings of Gilroy’s Black Atlantic can be apprehended through a new viewpoint focused on the Black Pacific where the cross-ethnic realities of Indigenous and Black peoples merge in an innovative and “fruitful collaboration in reclaiming a geography and a sense of belonging” (Fraile-Marcos, 2018: 193). So, if the dominant vision of the nation is itself a colonizing representation, the proposal of the kinship, through cross-ethnic allegiances, demanding their sense of belonging within the nation questions the ideological limits of Canada. In consequence, just as the nation-state is largely absent from the multifocal dialectics

of the Black Atlantic, the acknowledgement and participation of Indigeneity in the larger framework of the Black Pacific allows for a new way of comprehending the foundations of Canada and displaces the Canadian white civility project as the master discourse by vindicating the merging experiences of Indigenous and Black historical presence in British Columbia. This appears as a literary and intellectual exercise much needed in times of hardcore nationalisms that aim to distort the shared (hi)stories of nations.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Drawing on the impervious silence that has accompanied the historical claim of First Nations in their protest against their continued marginalization in the Canadian reality despite the directives that were passed in the Multiculturalism Act of 1988, Daniel Coleman has studied how “White Canadian culture is obsessed, and organized by its obsession, with the problem of its own civility” (Coleman, 2006: 5). This exclusionary sense of civility “that has become to be known as English Canada”, Coleman keeps on explaining, “has been the formulation and elaboration of a specific form of whiteness based on a British model of civility” (Coleman, 2006: 5). And so, “[b]y means of this conflation of whiteness with civility, whiteness has been naturalized as the norm for English Canadian cultural identity” (Coleman, 2006: 5).

<sup>2</sup> Recent works in (Black) Canadian literature attest to the role of mixed-race subjectivities in the reassessment of colonial legacies of racism and oppression. This is the case of Red/Black Canadian writer Dorothy Mills-Proctor’s non-fictional work “Born Indian Again”. For the study of this example of “Indigenous Black”, mixed-race subjectivity in Canadian fiction and its role in the Multiculturalism debate, see Eguibar Delgado (2018).

<sup>3</sup> For his part, Native American writer and scholar Gerald Vizenor has also tried out a transethnic approach in his work *Griever: An American Monkey King in China* (1987). In it, by means of a different account of the figure of “the trickster”, Vizenor establishes connections and alliances among Asian Americans and Native Americans. In tune with the nature of this essay, this transethnic reading of “the trickster” revels in the questioning of Western master narratives and invites us to become “active readers” (Vizenor, 1988: x) to disclose the multiple faces of ethnicity in the Americas.

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