

**URBAN REPRESENTATIONS OF AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIA:
THE RECONQUEST OF SPACE IN GEORGE ELLIOTT CLARKE'S *RED***

MIASOL EGUÍBAR HOLGADO
University of Oviedo

ABSTRACT. *This paper explores a series of five poems from the collection Red (2011) by Nova Scotian writer George Elliott Clarke. It focuses on the central role that place, and more specifically, urban space, plays in the construction of the region he significantly renames “Africadia”, from the perspective of the black community. Although people of African descent have lived in the island since the seventeenth century—forming the vastest African community in Canada—this presence tends to be unacknowledged or deliberately erased—as is the case of the razing of the neighbourhood of Africville—. In these poems, Clarke vindicates this denied space, imbuing it with the lives and experiences of its Africadian inhabitants.*

Keywords: Space, Africadia, George Elliott Clarke, Africville, identity, representation.

REPRESENTACIONES URBANAS DE LA NUEVA ESCOCIA AFRICANA: LA RECONQUISTA DEL LUGAR EN *RED*, DE GEORGE ELLIOTT CLARKE

RESUMEN. *Este artículo explora un conjunto de cinco poemas de la colección Red (2011) del escritor de Nueva Escocia George Elliott Clarke. Se centra en el relevante papel que el espacio, más específicamente, el espacio urbano, juega a la hora de construir la región que él significativamente re-bautiza como “Africadia”, desde la perspectiva de la comunidad africana. Aunque haya habido gente de ascendencia africana viviendo en la isla desde el siglo diecisiete, esta presencia suele pasar desapercibida e incluso llega a ser destruida intencionadamente—como es el caso de la demolición del barrio de Africville—. En estos poemas, Clarke reivindica este espacio negado, incluyendo en él las vidas y experiencias de sus habitantes africadianos.*

Palabras clave: Espacio, Africadia, George Elliott Clarke, Africville, identidad, representación.

Received 15 March 2013

Revised version accepted 17 June 2013

1. INTRODUCTION

George Elliott Clarke is one of Nova Scotia’s most relevant contemporary authors and intellectual figures. He has published several collections of poetry, plays, critical theory and one novel. Some of his most outstanding titles include *Execution Poems*, for which he was awarded the Governor General’s Award for poetry in 2001, and his collection of poems *Whylah Falls*, shortlisted for the 2002 edition of Canada Reads. He devotes a great part of his work to explore and promote the presence of black intellectual and cultural life in Canada, as reflected in his collection of critical essays *Odysseys Home*, published in 2002, which includes an extensive bibliography of black authors from all over Canada; or his anthology of black Nova Scotian literature, *Fire on the Water*—consisting of two volumes, published in 1991 and 1992—. In this article I am focusing on the representation of urban space in a group of five poems from his book *Red*. Published in 2011, *Red* is the third of his “colouring” books, following *Blue* (2001) and *Black* (2006). These five poems appear in a section of the book called “Red Sea”, and they deal, as the subheading in the index points out, with the region of Nova Scotia. I will explore the relevance of explicitly reconstructing a strong sense of the local and, more specifically, the urban context for the displaced community of black Nova Scotians. Absence, rejection, and the distance that comes with them, are all palpable in the contents of the poems in

“Red Sea”. This distance I am referring to is the enforced distance blacks have been subjected to on racial grounds. It is distance in the literal sense of the word, that is, spatial and physical, but it is also distance from the literary and social centre of Canada and particularly of Nova Scotia. The positioning of the black subject at the centre of a spatial redefinition of a regional consciousness and experience is revealed as a key element in the process of counteracting and shortening these distances.

As I mentioned earlier, during his career, Clarke has been and still is struggling to recover the obliterated history of black people in Canada, focusing on his native region. It is essential to emphasise the national character of Clarke’s quest, even though he develops this fight within a diasporic, and quite paradoxically transnational context. For his battle against invisibility operates at two levels: on the one hand, he denounces the marginalisation that black people suffer from the mainstream of society. On the other, within the African diaspora itself, black Canadians are often neglected, not recognised as a single, separate entity, but engulfed in the overarching ethnic designation of Afro-Americans or Afro-Caribbeans. As he explains in *Odysseys Home*: “I also came to recognize that African America *is* its own pseudo-nation, not a ‘sub-culture,’ but a *sub-civilization* of the United States, and that it is, like the American mainstream, solely self-absorbed. To be ‘Black’ and Canadian in that setting was to suffer the erasure of *Canadian* as a legitimate expression of black identity” (2002: 5, italics in the original). There is no place for a distinct Canadian blackness in the African diaspora as it is commonly understood and promoted, according to Clarke, by the works of critics such as Paul Gilroy. Gilroy supposedly aims at incorporating different aspects of the African diaspora under the transnational perspective of the unifying Black Atlantic. However, Clarke argues that he is actually providing a corpus of cultural referents in which black figures from the United States are over-represented. In doing so, he is projecting yet another discourse that places this nation’s cultural production at the centre around which all black identity revolves, making it impossible for a black Canadian consciousness to flourish. It is due to these diverse trajectories of displacement that Clarke coins the term “Africadia”, a combination between Africa and Acadia, which he defines as “an ethnocultural archipelago consisting of several dozen Black Loyalist –and Black Refugee– settled communities (including some in and about the Halifax-Dartmouth metropolitan region), whose foundings date back to 1783 and 1815 respectively” (2002: 107). The re-naming of this geographical area has strong nationalist implications in that it constitutes the definition and appropriation of place in terms of African-Canadian identity and culture.

2. "NORTH IS FREEDOM"

Clarke's efforts are, therefore, markedly nation and even region-oriented, in contrast with the trans- and even anti-nationalist tendencies of many African diaspora discourses today. This approach is reflected in the group of five poems analysed in this article. The first poem of the section is a brief, introductory poem entitled "North is Freedom", and although "north" probably refers to Nova Scotia, it could be applied to Canada as a whole. The "north" would be more specifically Canada in opposition to the United States, in the sense that Canada has been traditionally understood as a place of freedom, destination of slaves and refugees of the African diaspora, in stark contrast with the less tolerant and oppressive United States. This idea is sustained even today by widely acknowledged though inaccurate notions about Canada's open-mindedness, such as the fact that slavery was never practiced there, or the utter success of its official policy of multiculturalism. In actuality, slavery was practiced in Canada, even though most slaves were employed in household activities, as there were no extensive plantations; and the fact that the policy of multiculturalism has overcome discrimination is far from the truth. In fact, critics such as Naomi Pabst suggest that "this same multiculturalism fosters perceptions of blacks as having non-Canadian origins, a form of displacement, alienation, and expatriation (or repatriation) from the imagined community that is Canada" (2006: 119). In this short poem, however, there is no trace of such contradictions.

3. "GOING TO HALIFAX"

The statement "north is freedom" does not come across as ironic until it is confronted with the remaining poems of the section. The second one is entitled "Going to Halifax" and it is written "*à la manière de Gregory Frankson*" (2011: 62), a young black Canadian poet, performer and activist. In the first two lines of this poem Clarke establishes a parallelism between Halifax and hell, which is the first image that contrasts the "freedom" he previously alludes to: "If you are going to Hell,/I, I am going to Halifax" (62). In the following lines, an atmosphere of chaos, violence and overt sexuality prevails, especially in the last part of the poem, where even suicide is referenced as a sound option for the city inhabitants. These crude depictions are splattered with strokes of ironic humour, which gives the whole poem an almost satirical quality: "where cars giggle at accidents along vermicelli streets"; "or undertake tearful screws in homemade brothels,/moms and dads looking on, clapping";

and when talking about the “sailor’s syphilis”: ‘because them idiots think ya can’t get it/ if ya can’t spell it, eh?’” (62, 63). Clarke establishes here a brutal contrast between cheerful –“giggle”, “clapping”, a jocular phrase– and tragic or non-humorous –“accidents”, “tearful screws”, syphilis– concepts, and thus utilises the ironic oppositions to problematise the dramatic impressions conveyed by an otherwise disturbing cityscape.

Clarke is very consciously working to consolidate a Nova Scotian context, and he achieves this by including very markedly regional elements such as “*Schwartz* spices” or “*Minard’s* liniment”, –Nova Scotian products–, so that the poem could not be set anywhere but in Halifax. He creates this unmistakable sense of the local through rough and aggressive language. Even the presence of the sea, so inherent to Nova Scotian literature, is treated here in a demythified and almost obscene way: “and newspaper pages slathered/ with mackerel guts and blood”, “in my sea-choked, Venetian-venereal city,/ pearly gulls skirt purling waves”, the gulls paralleled to the “purring girls go[ing] click click click/ in tiny skirts” (62, 63). The poem thus departs from the kind of pastoral poetry that has been traditionally associated to the Maritimes region. There is no trace in its lines of an idealised city or urban experience, even though the poet palliates the victimising effect of a fully negative or apocalyptic account by introducing the element of satire in his narrative.

4. “ADDRESS TO TOMORROW’S NEGRO HALIGONIANS”

“Going to Halifax” speaks of frenzy and chaos in the city using a burlesque, acid tone, but there is no specific mention of its black inhabitants so far. The next poem is clearly directed at the black community of Nova Scotia: “Address to Tomorrow’s Negro Haligonians”. Here, the poet talks to future black readers and once again establishes a spatial context that is specific to Halifax, obviously in the title, but also by including names of places that can actually be located in the city, like “Gotti’gen Street”; names of local bars, such as “the Derby and the Tap”; or again Nova Scotian brands such as “*Alexander Keith’s*”, a brewery or “Sobey”, a supermarket (64). All these landmarks are familiar to anyone from Halifax, but, unlike in the previous narrative, in this case race issues transpire throughout the poem.

At this point, Clarke’s urgency to speak to his community becomes very apparent: as he states in an interview, “My horror is to be a writer who is not read by his own community. I like to think that I am giving back too” (1998: 158). This poem is infused with the kind of intimacy and familial emotion that

comes from belonging to the same community. This sense of a shared background is reflected in the introduction of elements related to oral communication, such as the way to approach his audience as his “belovèd readers”, those “who still call me ‘Georgie’”, and whom he later asks if they “remember my big, buck-toothed smile” (64). Clarke mentions events and commonplace practices from the past and present, and others which will probably still be relevant in the future, particularly related to the black community of the city. Such is the case of everyday experiences such as the reference to “brown kids” making “snow angels in that empty Sobey’s lot” (64). His preoccupation with race and the possibility that racism will persist in the future is reflected in the line “Does my pigment still bleed through my poems?” (64). Other speculations about the future of black people in Halifax include their possible relocation to “Africa –or wherever” (64). His uncertainty about the future of blacks translates also into an uncertainty about the future of Halifax. He writes that “Maybe Halifax has been long sunken under the waves”; and further ventures to predict America’s conquest of the whole world in the line “And the Yankee flag’s single star represents every human” (64). The threat that the United States poses as having the power to potentially erase distinct subjectivities through globalisation –or, rather, Americanisation– is ever-present in the case of Canada. It is especially difficult for Canadians to assert their identity in the shadow of the dominant hegemony of the United States, which thus exerts a new form of imperialism. This merging of identities into a single American one is yet to come, but today, the British Imperialism of the past may still be perceived in the “ebon queens of the Ladies Auxiliary” who “put on kilts” (64) although not overtly criticised or rejected, rather, appropriated.

This poem reveals the anxieties and doubts of the persona about the transformations that accompany the passing of time. The voice of the poet is given especial relevance and strength; his aesthetic and narrative work empowers it to travel through the years and reach people even amidst the unavoidable changes or the seemingly uncontrollable oppression: “I thought my poems should be boisterous/ So the shouts would reach you,/ [...] / Through the centuries of dust and lies (64). As the title suggests, it is the black community of future Nova Scotia with whom the poet establishes this dialectic relationship and the city of Halifax becomes the scenario for the various conjectures and insecurities about the fate of this community. What is most important, though, is that Clarke is representing the lives and experiences of blacks as inherent to the city’s past and future history; he is coupling Canadianness, or rather Nova Scotianness, with black people’s identity.

5. "FOUR UNKNOWN WOMEN"

The presence of Africans in Nova Scotia can be traced back to the eighteenth century, with the arrival of slaves and Loyalists from the United States after the American Revolution, and several communities have developed in the island since then, with the subsequent influx of slave refugees through the 'Underground Railroad', Maroons from Jamaica, and, more recently, immigrants from different parts of the world. Clarke himself is a 7th generation African Nova Scotian. It is on the grounds of this primeval tradition that he legitimises their claim to place and vindicates the African heritage as part of the cultural foundations of the island. As I have mentioned earlier, this presence tends to be overlooked, or even completely ignored, if not deliberately erased. Race has been a crucial factor in the division and structuring of space since the beginning of the settlement of African people in Nova Scotia. After the American Revolution, the British government offered farming land from the territories of what was then British North America to both black and white Loyalists in exchange for their allegiance. However, black Loyalists relocated in Nova Scotia received substantially less acres of land than white Loyalists, thereby impeding their economic expansion on even terms. Thus relegated to less advantageous locations, black people were soon considered a hindrance to the development of the colony and they became the objects of segregation and discrimination (Winks 1997, Mensah 2002).

Another, more recent example of this process of obliteration is the history of the settlement of Africville in Halifax: originally established in 1812 by former American slaves, it was destroyed in 1960s as part of an urban restructuring plan when the neighbourhood housed almost 400 people from 80 families, to build a bridge in its place. The community was thus dissolved, its inhabitants evicted and relocated in different parts of the region. The City of Halifax based the razing of Africville on the improvement and renewal of slums. The neighbourhood was considered a dangerous, filthy and decaying area; however, as Jennifer Nelson points out, "the City's responsibility for Africville's poor conditions through decades of neglect" (2011: 121) is often denied or ignored. It was the city council that placed a dump and a slaughterhouse in its surroundings and denied the settlement proper electricity and sewage systems and police and fire services. Africville was thus downgraded and constructed as a marginal focus of criminality and violence, clearly incongruous with the proper standards of the city. Nelson explains that "White ideologies about Black community, race, the poor, and otherness

shaped the political climate in the era preceding, accompanying, and following the destruction of Africville” (126). This unwanted racialised space is therefore disposed of; stigmatised, it is not bettered or promoted, but disintegrated. There are some inconsistencies as to the community’s response to this manoeuvre. Some critics, such as Angel D. Nieves sustain that its inhabitants did oppose resistance, but that it was ignored (2007: 90); George Elliott Clarke himself suggests that perhaps people should have taken more action when he says that Africville “has become a symbol of what happens to a culture which does not vigorously assert its right to exist” (1991: 11); finally, Maureen Moynagh explains that people in Africville initially agreed to its label of slum, and their efforts were directed at obtaining satisfactory conditions of relocation (1998: 29). Be that as it may, what is indisputable is that African Nova Scotians living in Africville did not have access to the institutional spheres and, therefore, they did not have the opportunity to be politically involved in the decision making process. Only recently, in 2010, an apology was offered from the mayor of Halifax for the loss of the community. This apology, which has taken forty years and a shift in the political strategies and ideological focus of the country, was issued to compensate for the loss of “opportunities for the young people who never were nurtured in the rich traditions, culture and heritage of Africville” (CBCnews, web); and it may be read in positive terms in that it reflects an inclusive attitude and an interest in rectifying and acknowledging certain mistakes committed in the past, at least in a representational or institutional level.

This historical background is relevant for the next poem, “Four Unknown Women”. Again, Clarke provides the reader with an evident chronotope, this time a terrible explosion that took place in the harbour of Halifax in 1917 after the collision of two ships, one of which was loaded with explosives, which severely damaged the city. The poem is structurally divided in two stylistically asymmetric parts. The first part is formed by eighteen anaphoric lines, all of them starting with the word “as”, and it contains all the objective, retrievable data from the accident: “As the maps declared, ‘Halifax, Nova Scotia,’/as the calendar read, ‘December 6, 1917,’/ as the clock ticked off, ‘9:06 a.m.,’” (65); as well as more subjective impressions or the perception of what must have been like for the inhabitants of the city to be involved in a disaster of such dimensions: “as the ocean moved in its bed and blanketed land,/ as the telegraphs fell to jabberwocky,/ as the schoolchildren wept and the churches collapsed” (65). This uniformly portrayed section is followed by a disengaged set of two lines –“after the thunderclap of devastation –/ after

the slaughter of the city” (65)– that both separates and introduces the second part, in which the unrecorded experience of the “unknown women” is told:

four unknown women –
 black women from the flattened shantytown –
 no, village –
 Africville –
 “for coloureds only,”
 stranded behind tracks,
 donned winter clothes and shoes and huge black overcoats
 and went out into the snuffing-out snow,
 looking over their losses –
 ten of us,
 the Seaview African Baptist Church –
 and kept on stepping, unbent,
 strong-willed,
 to rebuild (65,66).

The settlement of Africville, from which the four protagonists of the poem come, was not directly hit by the explosion, though it was considerably damaged due to the poor quality of the houses, and the area was not reconstructed nor did it receive as much assistance as other parts of the town. The poem captures the act of survival of four women whose steps would have probably gone unnoticed, as the neglect of Africville during this episode, and its obliteration later on show.

It is interesting, however, to notice that the chiasm produced by the isolated couplet might be more than just a formalistic gap. It is possible to read the action of this last part of the poem as not occurring at the same time as the first one, a conjecture that is first suggested in the repeated word of the introductory lines, “after”. Later on, in the description of the women, Clarke mentions that they belong to the “flattened shantytown –/ no, village –/ Africville”; and that they are contemplating what they have lost, “ten of us,/the Seaview African Baptist Church” (66). Since the explosion takes place in 1917, and Africville was not “flattened”, nor was its church destroyed until the 1960s, these references play with chronology and fragment the simultaneity between both actions, so that the image of the onward movement of the women may be ambiguously interpreted both as a consequence of the explosion and as a consequence of the razing of Africville fifty years later. The ambivalence of the women’s temporality is further reinforced with the last line of the poem, two words that significantly appear separated from the rest, “to rebuild” (66). The poem projects first a systemically depicted tragic panorama, and continues with another disheartening description

of the women's surroundings, to finish with a contrasting and powerful series of images: "and kept on stepping, unbent/ strong-willed/ to rebuild" (66). This emphasis on the women's physical and emotional re-emergence stands as a symbol for the rebirth that the destruction of Africville meant in cultural terms to the black community of Nova Scotia.

There is indeed a post-Africville awakening, an assertion and a claim to identity that is catalysed by the erasure of the community. Clarke affirms that, after a long period in which Africadian literature was dominated by religious texts, there is a Renaissance which comes primarily from the razing of Africville:

The issuance of so few texts between 1798 and 1974 indicates that Africadia endured a protracted cataclysm, one that required, not the generic modes of expression, but rather a Church-sponsored corpus of non-fiction and spiritual writings. The era posed a quintet of emergencies, of which the fifth –the doom of Africville (a historic Africadian community) in the late 1960s– precipitated the rebirth of Africadian literature (2002: 109-110).

This recent self-awareness is reflected in specifically anti-modern and nationalist cultural manifestations, such as the works of David Wood, Charles Saunders, Maxine Tynes or Frederick Ward (Moynagh 1998: 21, 24, 25). It is no coincidence that, in "Four Unknown Women", Clarke parallels two post-industrial events, one accidental, the other purposeful, but both charged with the threats of modernity. Progress, modernity, and the racialised de-centring of a collective are internalised as the factors which provoked the severing of affective ties for the black community of the city of Halifax. For even though living conditions in Africville might have been poor, the settlement had a tremendous importance for its inhabitants in emotional terms. As Nieves explains, Africville was "the heart of their community life, their circle of support, and the place where they had a strong sense of belonging" (2007: 91). Clarke's work, as that of many black Nova Scotian artists, constitutes a response to centuries of oppression, and to the devastating effects of progress, which find their greatest exponent in the destruction of this neighbourhood.

6. "TAXI"

The last poem of the section, "Taxi", lacks the spatial landmarks and referents that closely tie the previous poems to Halifax. Nevertheless, being again set in an urban context, and preceded by examples of such overt locality, it is safe to assume that this poem takes place either in Halifax, or, at least, in a Nova Scotian city. It addresses prejudice and assumptions about black people living in the

city, more specifically, the foregone conclusion that a black man, the son of a taxi driver, cannot be a poet. Although Clarke's father was not a taxi driver –he worked as a railway employee–, there are indications in the poem and through the book which suggest that the protagonists of "Taxi", father and son, may, to a certain extent, coincide with George Elliott Clarke and his father, William Clarke. First of all, Clarke dedicates *Red* to his father, whom he describes as an "*Artist, Motorcyclist, Intellectual, Liberal, Idealist, Actor, Romantic*" (2011: 6, italics in the original). Later, in the acknowledgements, he mentions him again, and tells how, apart from working for the railway company, he devoted part of his life to painting. The cover of the book, as well as all the paintings and photographs included inside –except for one– were made or taken by his father. In this choice of images, as well as in the dedication and acknowledgements, Clarke expresses deep admiration for his father's artistic and intellectual inclinations. In the poem, the taxi driver is described as "Courteous, cordial, proper, politic," and as a man who "lavished wit impeccably impish/ Encyclopedia-posh, and polished –/ With scholarly asides and rhymester's timing," (67). On these grounds, it is easy to see how both figures, Clarke's father and the father in "Taxi", can be paralleled, as they share the same type of job, and similar intellectual aptitudes.

The poem portrays two passengers, "blonde mother, blonde daughter", in contrasted with the "dark driver", who, after engaging in an amusing conversation with them hoping for a generous tip, goes as far as to tell them that his son is a poet. The women do not transmit their incredulity directly to the driver, rather they "were polite enough/ To transmute their blithe doubt to nods and smiles" (67). The patronising attitude is most clearly recorded in the lines "To expect *them* to credit *him* [...] / with fathering a son/ Who could credibly be crowned a *poet*" (67, emphasis in the original). Here, class and race constitute the basis for what is expectable or even acceptable from a black taxi driver. Art and intellectual life, in the eyes of the blonde women, who stand for mainstream society in a Nova Scotian urban context, do not belong in the world of "black chaps/ Delivering white ladies and luggage" (67), thus condescendingly categorised as irrevocably ignorant or uncultivated.

Once again, as he does in "Address to Tomorrow's Negro Haligonians", Clarke reasserts here the influential role of the poet's voice. In this case, his poetry is writing back to these acts of discrimination on class and racial grounds, which are not necessarily of an overt or obvious quality but, precisely because of their evasiveness, are more commonly endured by the Africadian community and more difficult to assault. In the acknowledgements, when he tells about his father's paintings, Clarke reiterates the power of art as a liberating tool, when he

wonders whether or not his father knew “that art could free an Africadian from the genial humiliations of a reluctantly bestowed, strictly stereotyped, and poorly remunerated j-o-b” (153). The last part of the poem reads:

I heard their apology for this apt
Assumption, almost tearful, but tactful,
As I taxi'd a book into their hands,
And spoke almost as graciously, graceful,
As my unparalleled father would have. (67)

It is here that the correspondence between the poem's persona and the author can be most clearly recognised. These lines reflect an authoritative, reasserting voice which answers back and receives an apology for those “genial humiliations” and stereotypes Clarke alludes to in the last pages of the book.

7. CONCLUSION

Clarke's poems bring back to life historical events that have been relevant for the city of Halifax, including in them the representation and point of view of the black community. He re-constructs the urban space with its regional, distinctive elements to unequivocally address a Haligonian audience; but this space is lived through the bodies and voices of those who are often invisibilised, and he even carries these experiences into the future. By making reference to Africville, he alludes to the discrimination and literal displacement of black people in the city, and palliates its effects by positioning them at the centre of his fiction.

Regionalism and a very localised sense of place are essential in these five “Nova Scotia” poems. McKittrick and Woods have suggested that “identifying the ‘where’ of blackness in positivist terms can reduce black lives to essential measurable ‘facts’ rather than presenting communities that have struggled, resisted, and significantly contributed to the production of space” (2007: 6). In Clarke's work, however, this identification proves not to be restrictive. Rather, it is precisely the “where” of black experience that needs to be explored and revisited in order to be redefined. The specific geography of Africadia forms the basis for a recently born nationalism that is nevertheless deeply rooted in the history of the region. Throughout his poetry and much of his critical work, Clarke deals with the double –or, rather, triple– marginalisation of black Nova Scotian cultural productions: first, within Canada, the Maritimes region are often regarded as provincial and ex-centric; within Nova Scotia blacks have experienced rejection and the obliteration of their historical presence; lastly,

even within the broader context of the African diaspora, there is an under-representation of African Canada, in favour of more outstanding African American figures. However, Clarke's work is not merely a critique against these factors. He captures all the elements coming from the various sources that have modified and helped shaping a unique black identity in Nova Scotia, be it elements from the region itself, from the rest of Canada, from Britain or the United States. As he explains, "African-Canadian culture and literature have domesticated –nationalized– their influences enough to create an aboriginal *blackness*, even if this mode of being remains difficult to define or categorize" (2002: 12-13). Even when he denounces discrimination, not only is he exposing a unilateral internalisation of its effects: just as "Four Unknown Women" does not stop at the point of mourning the loss of Africville, and its protagonists head on to a new horizon, there is a persevering dialogical response in his poetry, uttered with an empowered voice that aims at recovering visibility. In order to create an Africadian consciousness he strategically positions the black subject in a local geography that in these poems materialises into, but is not limited to, an urban context. This way Clarke reconstructs the regional experience with an Africadian glance, reversing and shortening the imposed distance that has removed African Nova Scotians from their place in Canadian identity, history and culture.

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