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**Clement Virgo's *Poor Boy's Game*:
Dealing with Anti-black Racism in Canada**

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Introduction

Poor Boy's Game is a very singular film that came out in September 2007. It is co-written by Clement Virgo, a Jamaican-born African Canadian, and Chaz Thorne. Virgo is the author of numerous films including *Rude* (1995), *The Planet of Junior Brown* (1997), *Love Come Down* (2000), and *Lie With Me* (2005). Unlike these other films, Virgo's 2007 work tackles a thematic issue that most would rather see unspoken about insofar as it is considered inexistent. In fact, *Poor Boy's Game* deals with racism in Canada, which, as it appears, keeps eating back at the face of Canadian people the same way the Freudian repressed refuses to remain buried, thus keeps on coming back up to the fore. Being a African Canadian who faces the unspoken and buried and yet present prejudices and stereotypes of his society, Virgo holds the bull by the horn because he fears that his failure to do so will result in his being held accountable for some complicit silence by the tribunal of History.

Virgo puts together a very impressive crew of actors which is inclusive of Greg Bryk (Keith Rose), Laura Regan (Emma), Hugh Thompson (Chris Webb), Flex Alexander (Ossie Paris), Rossif Sutherland (Donnie Rose) on the side of well-established actors like Danny Glover (George), Stephen McHattie (Uncle Joe) and Tonya Lee Williams (Ruth Carvery). No wonder, the film received the Best Atlantic Feature from the 27th Atlantic Film Festival and the Best Canadian Feature of the Calgary International Film Festival in the month it came out.

The importance of the film resides in the pertinence of its thematic focus. Racism is an issue in Canada despite claims sustaining the country pristine image compared to the United States where race relations not only have always been boisterous but also have



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always loomed behind questions that involve the life and identity of the nation. In other words, the belief is dominant in Canada that racism is no part of Canadians' interpersonal relations as it is allegedly the case south of their border. This critical film review seeks to come to grips with societal issues that Canada shares with the United States, and why the issue of race, multiculturalism and the necessity of a better vision conducive to a more inclusive society must be given utmost importance and attention.

1. Reconciling Extremes

Virgo's film is mainly about Donnie Rose, the product of a racist environment who is paroled after spending five years in prison for a ten-year sentence. Rose has been serving his time for allegedly beating George Carvery's son who consequently became incapacitated. Once outside the prison, Rose exhibits signs of a person who has fundamentally changed. In fact, fully aware of the vengeance seething through the black community Rose is intent upon the bridging the gap between the white and black of highly racialized Halifax. When George Carvery comes face to face with the tormentor of his son, he finally surpasses his vengeful disposition. More importantly, Carvery decides to serve as Rose's coach in a boxing party opposing Ossie Paris, a celebrated black boxer, who is intent on inflicting a corrective punishment on Rose for shaming the entire black community. It goes without saying that Carvery's decision goes against the grain of what his community expects. And yet, he does not intend to see his son's condition politically appropriated by an angered people like his.

Virgo's intention is to merge two diametrically opposed extremes (the white and black) characterized by racial violence. Here the Black person represents the dregs of Canadian society whereas the White stands for power, opulence and high class. Notwithstanding the position of superiority occupied by Whites, Virgo makes Donnie Rose a hero who will bridge up the gaping divide between the two communities not without raising a sense of disbelief in the viewer. In fact, the poverty has a color which is black. To make Donnie's characterization believable, this protagonist is made a member of the working class. More interesting is Virgo's lessons in economic and environmental



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determinism. The heroism of Donnie is conditioned by the sameness of his class with Black people, thereby making the case for Donnie's violence as being inspired by poverty, or capitalist economic exploitation. The choice of characters is also of extreme importance. Donnie is a champion that exudes charisma among the people of his kind as well as the arrogance that characterizes them with regards Black people. And yet, over the years spent behind bars Donnie got rehumanized. He morphs from the mean and violent man into a pensive, composed, humble and loving person. The possibility of such a transformation of Donnie makes him a perfect candidate for Virgo's cause: the hero, as unconventional as may be, permits the balancing of social and racial relations. In view of what precedes, Virgo gives to see that none is bad or mean; all is capable of positive transformation. Donnie, who has been the best representative of the white community and all that the latter stands for, ultimately knows redemption. The Black who is persecuted and understandably harbours grudges against Whites finally swallows his pride and forgives, if not forgets the wrongs experienced by him. Carvery's incapacitated son ends up getting moved by the performance of Donnie who caused him to be in this unfixable state. He chooses the White man over Ossie Paris, and by extension the Black community, which is fuelling the brazing fire of the ring. Carvery himself transcends his pain and drops his vengeance on behalf of the coming of a safer, liveable environment which is inclusive of differences.

2. Reflection of History or (Inter-)contextuality

Originality is not only about the production of *ex nihilo* creations, but it also derives from what may be called "transformative realism", i.e. a realism that appropriates factual truth and reshapes it for fictional purposes. Such is the case with *Poor Boy's Game*.

Virgo's work gave way to a good measure of reactions from the viewers because of their being cognizant of the reality that informed the film. Mindful of the film's racial (inter-)contextuality, Peter Howell, as is usually the case, rather downplays its historical and contextual value on behalf of interpretations grounded in mere aesthetics and superficiality. Howell notes, "It would be easy to view *Poor Boy's Game* as yet another



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boxing picture about redemption, but that's far too narrow a perspective. The film does function on a strictly action level, with well-shot fight sequences that are all the more intense for their grainy lensing [...].”¹ This is Eurocentric interpretation seeking to deplete African or non-European works of their true content and meaning for practical reasons among which is such works’ subversive potential with regards inequality and social injustice. All but Peter Howell know that *Virgo’s* is no action-packed film cineaste, and more importantly, the film draws on a factuality that all but negationists will not see in order to offer themselves a clear conscience. In fact, *Poor Boy’s Game* is about the racist nature of certain events and people in Nova Scotia’s Halifax. Like the fictional Halifax in *Virgo’s* oeuvre, actual Halifax used to rest on social, economic and political cleavages that were deeply entrenched in racial preference and its attending plagues, i.e. segregation and discrimination. Blacks, the object of xenophobia, ostracism and racism in Halifax, were former or freed slaves from the United States (between 1782 and 1784) along with Jamaican ex-slaves between 1796 and 1800, who migrated to Nova Scotia in search for better prospects in this Canadian province.

Between 1840 and 1860 more than 40000 slaves and ex-slaves, through the celebrated Underground Railroad led by Harriet Tubman moved from the slaveocratic South of the U.S. in the Canadian province along with poor Whites for the same purpose: in search of better-being. The first Blacks came in upon the instigation of British colonizers against whom the British colonized entered in rebellion. Any Black or White who accepted to move into the British colony of Canada land and provisions were promised. On the bank of the Detroit River a monument is built in their honour in Canada’s Ontario, the terminal of the Underground Railroad. Canadians self-congratulate for wholeheartedly welcoming Blacks in times of trials and tribulations. The inscriptions on the monument read: “found in Canada friends, freedom and protection, under the British flag.” Notwithstanding these beautiful words and the reality they translated, Blacks were nagged by prejudice and racist resentment as was the lot south of the

¹ See Peter Howell “Poor Boy Game.” *Arts and Opinion*. Vol. 7. No.4 (2008).



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Canadian border. While they were denied the land and provision promised to newcomers, White colonists had the most fertile lands. Loyalists as they were called, Blacks earned this epithet after militarily contributing to Canada's fight for independence.

Africville is the historical referent for the regrouping of Blacks in a section of Halifax because of segregation and racial discrimination reminiscent of US southern states like Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and the two Carolinas a Manichean scission (White vs. Coloured /Black) of facilities and amenities (public transportation, pools, restaurants, etc.) was enforced without fail. This neighbourhood later on served for sewing installations as well as a site for dumping toxic and chemical waste, which is nothing but the implementation of an environmental policy that Halifax availed itself of in order to rid the city of blemishes if not its "dark spot." These ex-slaves used to be baptized by Reverend Richard Preston in the used waters of the Bedford bay which was cornered on the north east side by the harbour on the Atlantic. Forsaking Africville wound up ghettoizing it to the point where it became a center for all sorts of trafficking. The neighbourhood thus became a conundrum for all-white Halifax to such an extent that in 1957 the authorities of the city dusted off renovation projects outlined and supported by the Stephenson Commission during World War II. The projects intended to raze off Africville on behalf of decent housing developments. In the late 1960's, Halifax translated its projects and this place became a thing of the remote past. That's why, in 2004 Cecil Foster, a Canadian race theorist and philosopher, notes that "Africville is more than just the story of how the most vibrant Black and African settlement in Canadian history was erased as an act of government policy. It shows how [...] prejudice demanded the eradication of a community that the dominant imagination saw as only a slum or a blight on an otherwise pristine landscape" (Foster 100-1). Africville residents who perceived reparation only had 400\$ while unlucky ones entrusted their fate to lawyers and uncertain litigations. Nowadays, the spot of African pristine presence in Canada is a recreation park even though this effacement hardly affects the memory of the original Black Nova Scotians.



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Today, more than ever, in US southern states as well as in much of this country, racism weaves through institutions so subtly and is so dissimilated that a good measure of awareness and wit is required to sense it. The same goes for present-day Nova Scotia, if not the whole of Canada. Nova Scotian anti-Black sentiments target Black autochthonous in matters of job, housing and others. In the field of higher education there is an utter inadequacy between the percentage of Blacks and the number of students and professors of this origin, even after the 1954 abolition of laws and measure germane to Jim Crow laws in the US.

All of what precedes sets the background of Virgo's film. Even today, interracial tension is no less absent. That's why Donnie's leaving the prison on a five-year probation is felt like a dagger in the back of Black people. Representative of the Nova Scotian Black community, Charlie Carvery's mother does not let go of her anger against the disabler of her son. Not even the cheque that Donnie leaves on the Carvery dining table is capable of assuaging her justified resentment and wrath. In the community itself, tensions are on the highest level; night clubs are reflective of stark racialized division of the town. For instance, upon his release the rehabilitation of Donnie Rose begins with his employment in famous night club. With Keith Rose, his elder brother, and Donnie are ordered not to allow admittance of Blacks. When some Africans decide to force their way into the club, violence ensues whereby not only a historical Black church is destroyed by arson, but also Keith Rose is tortured and killed.

Without any doubt, the tragic death of Keith, who actually did beat Charlie even though Donnie went to prison in his stead, contribute to the justice-seeking gait of the film. There is a perceptible retaliatory reaction meant as if to equilibrate harms done to the opposing communities. Retaliation rather speaks to the need to avoid activating the cycle of violence: violence will breed (counter-)violence. Beyond Keith's death – no matter how gratuitous this violence may look –, it is very seemingly Virgo's intent to repudiate any sort of violence in two communities bound to live together. In his review Ian Gaddell notes, "Without being earnest, Virgo attempts to make an honest plea for forgiveness rather than perpetuate the cycle of violence and grief that grips this small



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community.”² Virgo attempts to claim that tensions such as the ones that induced the making of *Poor Boy’s Game*, just as well as social problems, are better dealt with when they are brought to people’s attention. In the same vein, George Elliott Clarke, a native of Nova Scotia and celebrated writer, poet and university professor of literature who coined the phrase “Africadian,” hails the film adding that a great deal of African-Canadian history needs to be told and/or adopted to the screen as Virgo does. According to Elliott Clarke one fact of extreme importance remains race relations, which should be even overemphasized:

Race relations in Nova Scotia are very different from where they are in any other part of the country. And they’re worse here. They are inherited by succeeding generations. Halifax was founded by the British navy—hardly known for egalitarianism. That’s why we have the North End versus South End, black versus white.³

Elliott Clarke reminds us of a dark side of Halifax’s history, and by extension Canada’s race relations history. There is a blatant lack of gratitude for Blacks after all the blood and sweat they spilled for the British and, by extension, Canada. During the war opposing France and Great Britain outside Europe and in their overseas colonies, a war that some historians dubbed “war of independence” rightly or wrongly, even though these nations were in search of lebensraum outside the old continent, the British did pitch in the Black human resource available at the time – mostly African American for war. Black did have their own regiments though this was placed under the command of a white officer. Thus they earned their name Black Loyalists. The British defaulted on their promise with regards Black Loyalists; instead, the latter were served the bitter dish of prejudice and discrimination. Nova Scotia, or better Halifax, still retain what that city is remembered by as regards Blacks: fear for alterity or difference, xenophobia and

² See Ian Gaddell, “*Poor Boy’s Game* looks at Halifax’s Race Relations,” *Straight.Com: Vancouver Online Source*.

³ See Shaylah Howell and Chris Reardon, “An Inconvenient Truth,” *Halifax Magazine*, September 2007.



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exclusion. That's why Tonya from Ontario cannot but see a racialized cleavage reminiscent of southern US when she claims,

I don't think I had any idea, coming from Toronto where there's a real melting pot and diversity of people living next door and across the street. (...)The view from the hotel where I was staying, it was rare I saw anyone not white. Then you go to North Preston, and some of East Preston, and some of those communities, and there are only black people. The only other time I've seen this is like in Jackson, Mississippi and South Carolina. I never thought in Canada we had that kind of segregation, but it exists. That's something I'll take away with me.⁴

Halifax and what the city represented for "people of colour" in its midst stand as a blight on the pristine image of Canada's multicultural motto "*E Pluribus Unum*". Beyond Halifax, one must cast a scrutinizing eye on race relations in great Canadian conglomerations. In an interview that he gives in Montreal, Clement Virgo does not spare Ontario's Toronto:

In Toronto, it's a lot more subtle. But in Halifax, you'd go into a restaurant, and someone would look at you, like, 'This space is not your space. This space belongs to us and you're not welcome here.' I was quite surprised.⁵

In other words, Virgo knows about the existence of a far more robust enemy than racism that is overt. "Covert racism", or "institutional racism", and "subliminal racism"⁶ are difficult to detect and to combat because of their insidiousness. Virgo believes that

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See Matthew Hays, "Settling the Score: Clément Virgo and Rossif Sutherland on *Poor Boy's Game*, their Halifax-set Story of Boxing, Violence and Racial Tension," *Montreal Mirror*. Nov. 29 – Dec. 05 2007. Vol. 23 No. 4.

⁶ This form of racism "is rooted in that class of persons who, in principle, abhor racism or discrimination yet harbour resentment in doing anything to eliminate this racism if cost or inconvenient are involved" (Fleras 437).



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Halifax's case is no singular. Instead, it represents the hidden face of a huge iceberg in that the racism Blacks and other ethnicities witness show that multicultural does not best translate Canada's cultural make-up; monocultural multiculturalism – i.e. a multicultural policy that with the “tendency to impose a monocultural uniformity because of the proclivity to ‘pretend pluralism’” (Fleras 439) –does. The Toronto-based cineaste believes that

Halifax is not really different from the rest of Canada if you believe that what it comes down to is access to power. How do you get a person of colour or an immigrant into the corporate world or the media? Words like multiculturalism come easy, but how do you put that into practice? [...] We say we are a unique society in Canada because of our multiculturalism, but in terms of our institutions, our media, and our politics, the questions we ask are still essentially about French and English. Will the country break up over language?⁷

The man points to the lack of equity and political will in Canada's power-sharing between nationalities and “races.” This lack is further felt by Blacks than any other Canadian minority. There is a cultural stratification that resists being identified. Anglo-Saxon culture and identity ranks first and the bottom of the ladder is saved for the “Other.” This state of affairs brings into light the parody of Canadian multiculturalism. Virgo tackles the quintessential issue of language in Canadian multiculturalism, which late Pierre Elliot Trudeau sought to face head-on. Despite Trudeau's good faith and political will the language question has not been touched in an in-depth manner. The tyranny of the colonizing languages (French and English) is more that vividly enforced. The co-signatories of agreements that presided over the formation of the Canadian state do not intend to see their cultures and languages brought down to the same footing as the Aboriginals, let alone the languages of those that Will Kymlicka calls “ethnic minorities”

⁷ See Ian Gaddell, “*Poor Boy's Game* looks at Halifax's Race Relations,” *Straight.Com: Vancouver Online*.



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as opposed “national minorities.”⁸ This translates the *raison d’être* of the Royal Bicultural and Bilingual Commission. The commission is about Canada’s bicultural nationalism as best exemplified by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the interface of the B&B in broadcasting. For instance, when other communities than Quebeckers and the English want more languages broadcast on television and radio, the CBC answers:

It is natural that some of these groups should want broadcasts in their own language, but the Corporation is not in a position to meet this demand [because the Corporation is] a Federal agency, the statutory creation of the Parliament [which] recognizes only two official languages. (B&B 183)

Augie Fleras’s critique of Canadian multiculturalism thus comes right in point. The Ontario-based sociologist writes, “[...] Canada’s official multiculturalism is not about cultivating diversity – despite assurances that differences are a strength rather than a liability. Under the pretend pluralism of a culture-blind multiculturalism, differences are stripped of their context and history. Differences are not celebrated under an official multiculturalism but are de-policed by ‘neutering’ them of their potency to challenge, resist, and transform”(Fleras 441).

3. Beyond Halifax

Beyond Halifax, the film looks at the whole country caught in a logic of preference that forecloses true and efficient pluralism. Playing hide and seek best translates the attitude of certain Canadians when it comes to “race” and its avatars. Like the ostrich stuffing its head into the sand in avoidance of danger, some people are afraid of resembling the neighbours south of the border notwithstanding the presence of almost

⁸ Ethnic minorities, according to Will Kymlicka, are those nationalities or ethnic groups that came to Canada on a voluntary basis. To these he opposes the national minorities, which group consists of the French, the English and the Aborigines. Even though the French and the English are otherwise called the Colonial Vanguard, which simply puts them under the same rubric as the so-called voluntary immigrants, one can curiously notice that the two groups are put on the same pedestal as the Natives of the land. Is it because the expectations of colonization and immigration are different as he writes, “[...] the former result(s) from a deliberate policy aimed at the systematic recreation of an entire society in a new land; the latter result(s) from individual and familial choices to leave (one’s) society and join another existing society” ? (Kymlicka 95)



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all the same elements allowing for Americans to be seen as less open to diversity. The more Canada tries not to look like the bid Other of the south, the more the policies of the two countries look alike. In the name of inclusiveness and multiculturalism Canada also celebrate the Black History month very much during the same time as the United States. In 2007 when Blacks in Quebec were commemorating Blackness and the figures standing for it both in Canada and around the world, voices were calling in condemnation of the absence of Blacks in Quebec curriculum and educational manuals. Some critics have hard time noticing a thorough blackout on someone like Mathieu Da Costa (a Black polyglot proficient in English, French, Dutch, Portuguese and Mic Mac). Da Costa served as an interpreter to Samuel de Champlain during exchanges between Aborigines and French colonists. Da Costa is nowhere to be found in Quebecois history books. In the same Francophone province a certain Marie-Joséphine Angélique, a Black servant in the service of Monsignor de Francheville, protesting against her enslavement and the subsequent racism of her master – and by the same token, the territory passing from one colonial to the other – set the master's house on fire. Only the criminal side of Angélique's deed is retained; the reason behind her actions is silenced, and this so done for practical reasons. As well, according to Robin Winks, a historian who published a seminal research on Black presence in Canada, in New France Olivier Le Jeune was in the service of Jesuit missionary Paul Le Jeune who, as the name indicates, was his master. About him Winks writes,

[he] is not only the first Negro to whom we can give more than a name, he is the first to have been transported directly from Africa, to have been sold as a slave in New France, and apparently to have died as a free man.(Winks, 1-2)

Inclusion of these figures in Quebecois history annals would rather serve both the province and its Black population than do a disservice to the French of Quebec. More than anything else, Quebec's inclusion of these erased figures in its grand narrative will prove the province's face to face with its own history. This is not likely, however. The 2008 conclusions of the Bouchard-Taylor commission on reasonable accommodations in Quebec with the mounting uproar preceding the closure of the roaming town meetings



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testify to the unpreparedness of the Quebecois to embrace multiculturalism. Even what the commission recommends – interculturality – is suspicious and denotes the lack of seriousness allocated to such a serious matter.

On the English-speaking side tensions are no less visible. Scholarly activism is geared towards denouncing the lack of equity and inclusiveness for the multiple minority groups that map out the province. In the West of the country, in the Prairies, and in Ontario where dwells a substantial number of Blacks, inclusion and/or multiculturalism is but a mirage. The sweeping racist feeling in English-speaking Canada led R. Bruce Sheppard to pen *Deemed Unsuitable* so as to indict anti-Black racism as enshrined by certain Canadian authorities and their edicts. In the 1900's, the immigration of former slaves flooding in from Oklahoma was taken very negatively by the population as well as the elected officials on political longevity depended on giving in the whims of the masses. Far from clearing some political leaders of their unconscionable actions, Sir Wilfrid Laurier signed an edict on August 12, 1911 whereby he ordered the prohibition of Black immigration into Canada:

For a period of one year from now and after the date hereof the landing in Canada shall be and the same is prohibited of any immigrants belonging to the Negro race, which is deemed unsuitable to the climate and requirements of Canada.⁹

Clearly, the climate of the Prairies was no problem for Blacks since they were already living under the same climatic duress in the land of their provenance. The truth is that the Black could not meet the biological and ideological requirements of entry into Canada at that time. In the meantime, Eastern Europeans were settling in the Prairies since 1880. They could easily melt into the population because they were White even though culturally speaking Ukrainians and others needed to be ushered into the manners,

⁹ Bruce Shepard borrows the title of his book from the Prime minister's edict. See the edict in *Deemed Unsuitable*, p. 86.



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habits and dominant culture of Western Europeans. To that end, commercial propaganda had currency.¹⁰

Virgo's film is one of those works that point to Negrophobia as well as distrust and fear for the Other (alterophobia) in Canada. As mentioned above, George Carvery is a striking example of acceptance of the oppressor, thereby showing the way to other oppressed. *Poor Boy's Game* must be viewed as one of these movies that stretch beyond interracial relations in Canada. Fundamentally, Virgo stigmatizes the vacuity of the concept of Canadian multiculturalism as well as those who exercise in duplicity for want of being socially and politically correct. The concept is utilized by partisans of politicking who seek to blur visibility about social and economic disparities between the diverse people of the country. One instance of such duplicitous and tendentious use of the concept is co-opting few members of the so-called minorities, the visible as well as less visible. An example of such tokenism is Maka Koto, a Cameroonian Canadian Member of Parliament for the Bloc Québécois. The ascension of this *pure laine* African may be construed as an indication of the openness of the most nationalist of Canadian political parties. Reality begs differently because it is rather bitter: Francophones from Africa and, to some extent, French-speaking Arabs from the Maghreb, painstakingly seek for work without success. When discrimination is absent at the level of job, the people of colour undergo racial profiling in urban areas both in Francophone and Anglophone Canada.¹¹ What is at stake here is the criminalization of "race."¹² The criminal behaviour displayed by certain members of a given group tends to be extended to the entire group as is the

¹⁰ For example, in 1920 a 20-minute film was shot for the assimilation/ integration of Ukrainians into the life of the people of the Prairie. The film is titled "Nation Building in Saskatchewan: The Ukrainians."

¹¹ According to Faizal R. Mirza, there is racial profiling when "certain criminal behaviour is projected onto a specific racial group and then acted upon by law enforcement when using powers to stop, detain and search." See Mirza, *Racism, Eh ?*, p. 95.

¹² The word "race" ought to be used with extreme care because it offers a sociological and semantic basis to supremacist and racist behaviours. To accept this word is synonymous with validating racism which Augie Fleras defines as being "those ideas and ideals (ideology) that assert or imply the superiority of one social group over another because of perceived differences, both physical or cultural, together with the institutionalized power to put these beliefs into practice in a way that exploits or excludes the 'other' because of who they are or what they do"(Fleras 434).



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case with African Americans who historically have hard time with the police and the judiciary system at large. The projection of the crime of a member upon the entire community justifiably leads to the impression that crime is being racialized. Such interferences result from a lack of a critique of the historical and ideological construction of “race” and its attending categories, which tend to be taken as fixed and immutable both in time and space.

In the educational realm, both at the primary and secondary levels, designers of the pedagogical manuals will do much to favour learners when their works will be inclusive of the history of Blacks, mostly in territories and provinces where there is a considerable concentration of people of African pedigree. Thus the history of Blacks will be excavated from the oblivion some deliberately engulfs it.

Nowadays, a commendable experiment is in currency in Toronto. The Afrocentric School project is an Africa-based curriculum intended for African students in Canada. The purpose is to remedy the skyrocketing rates of drop-out and failure among Black students. The project was strongly opposed by some Ontarians on account of its potential of installing more cleavage in Canadian society. The truth is that this opposition is not guided by the aim of seeing a unified Canada where cultural identities and differences work in the service of Canadianness, i.e. Canadian national identity. Instead, these opponents find fault with the historical agenda because they are infatuated with the status quo whereby the dominant culture is placed on such a pedestal that it is considered to be reflective of a multicultural country. And yet, the Toronto University professor, George Sefa Dei, a pivotal actor of the Afrocentric project, has less faith in Canadian multiculturalism: “multiculturalism works principles of symbolic equality at the expense of material and cultural equity. [...]. Multiculturalism celebrates cultures and their diversity without necessarily responding to power issues of difference” (Dei 58). In other words, Canada is still in the imaginary of some people as a Whiteman’s country. Clearly, a Black school with its ethnocentric curriculum sets up a paradigm that this opposition apprehends as an attempt to remove the deeply engrained belief that all should rally around the already existing values foregrounding the founding texts of the nation; i.e.



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Whiteness and Eurocentric thinking and practices. One then understands why critical anti-racist scholarship – of which Dei is a strong defender and which presided over the Toronto project – puts multiculturalism in Canada on a par with imperialism within the hegemonic prism to be resisted through “challenging and changing values, structures, and behaviours that perpetuate systemic racism and other forms of oppression (Ibid 59).

Conclusion

Ultimately, Virgo’s film is an act of archaeological unearthing and humanism devoid of any supremacist, ethnocentrist or logocentric ideology. It seeks to disclose the humanity of the Black and, by the same token, that of all those who feel forgotten and erased. George Elliott Clarke notes that works unearthing and resuscitating Blacks have the potential to lay “could bare the ‘clandestine’ racism of Canadian authority and popularize the resistive strategies of African-Canadian communities” (Elliott Clarke 69).

Poor Boy’s Game ought to be considered as a major work despite the weight of the social plague that Virgo intends to fight: racism. It is a genuinely humanist act; the producer seems to reversing Rudyard Kipling’s formulae in his celebrated poem “The White Man’s Burden: The United States and the Philippine Islands” whereby Western humanist ideology is proudly displayed. His is an actual re-appropriation of H. T. Johnson’s answer to Kipling.¹³ The commitment of the person of colour to his/her cause is more than necessary. The pre-eminence of forgiveness, with the complete commitment of the victim’s father, for the inter-group cohesion is Virgo’s plea to Canadians who should transcend race. Such is the sense of Cecil Foster’s call as well: “In a place where

¹³ Rudyard Kipling’s text is an apology of European imperialism and colonialism. Notwithstanding interpretive attempts that whiten up this text from its ideological and humanistic charge, it no less remains a treaty that consigns our world in a paradigm of pathetic hierarchization of human beings based on their biology or “race.” The white is considered to be cultured, superior while others are but a bunch of savages and barbarous without morale. It is thus imperious to read responses to Kipling among which are Reverend H.T. Johnson’s, a Black preacher from Georgia’s Atlanta. Johnson reminds Americans of their wrong doing mostly with regards to Blacks. Titled “The Black Man’s Burden,” Johnson’s response came out the same year as the poem that inspired him in 1899.



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there is no race, perhaps Blacks and other visible minorities will be released from their double burdens and their double-consciousness” (Foster, 193).

George Carvery and Donnie Rose succeed in soaring above social cleavages that hold the one’s community stranger to the other’s. The two men’s courage in facing head-on segregation and discrimination, distrust and racial violence result not only in the satisfaction of grieving mother of Donnie’s who lost her son Keith, but also the smile that unites George Carvery and Donnie Rose, and by the same token the two opposed communities. There is a question that fiction-based hope raises: will this film lead to interracial co-existence such as a multicultural society is characterized? Future will provide the answer.

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