

# "Who Is She and What Is She to You?" Mary Ann Shadd Cary and the (Im)possibility of Black/Canadian Studies

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## ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the relationship between Black Studies, Canadian Studies and Black diasporic discourses and incorporates the figure of Mary Ann Shadd Cary as an intellectual guide to argue for a place within Canadian Studies for a sustained conversation concerning Blackness. The paper is a conceptual exercise in working through the concern of why discourses of Blackness in Canadian Studies operate much like a special effect and why Canadian Blackness is also not sustained in Black Studies discourses.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article adresse la relation entre les Études des Noirs, les Études canadiennes et les discours dispersifs noirs et, incorpore Mary Ann Shadd Cary en tant que guide intellectuel pour défendre une place à l'intérieur des Études canadiennes et pour avoir une conversation soutenue au sujet de la négritude. L'article est un exercice conceptuel qui se fait avec le souci de savoir pourquoi le discours sur la négritude dans les Études des Noirs fonctionne comme un effet spécial et pourquoi la négritude canadienne n'est pas soutenue dans les discours des Études des Noirs non plus.

A Black feminist historiography would begin with the writings of newspaper editor and publisher Mary Ann Shadd who, as early as 1852, wrote *A Plea for Emigration to Canada West*, a treatise informing Blacks in the United States about the benefits of emigrating to Canada West. She wrote articles on women's rights and informed her readers through the *Provincial Freeman* newspaper of suffragist meetings in Canada West and the United States.

(Bristow et al 1994, 4-5)

On Sunday, June 7th 1998 *The Toronto Star* published an article with the headline, "Minorities Set to Be Majority." The article relayed that by the year 2000, 54 percent of the population in Toronto, Ontario would be non-white. That same Sunday, *The Toronto Star* report was the lead story on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's *Sunday Night Report* program. This information has been occasioning anxiety among those who see themselves as the guardians of Canada's national image. An image minted in one colour - white.

These reports prompted me to think about Black people within the coming "super-multicultural" population of Toronto and of Canada more generally. How will this new population shift in Canada's largest city and its most important business centre affect the place of racial minorities in national narratives? What will it mean for Black people? To think about this dilemma, I turned to Mary Ann Shadd Cary's, *A Plea for Emigration: Or Notes of Canada West*, published in 1852. I wanted to see what conceptions Black people had of Canada and migration prior to the migrations of the 1950s, 60s and 70s, with which they are usually associated. I came to one conclusion: We need Mary Ann Shadd Cary, more than ever, now.

In this article, I focus on the national imagery through a discussion of Black Studies and Canadian Studies. I am particularly interested in the ways in which Black political cultures in Canada impact on our conceptions of what Canada is. This paper is a conceptual exercise that explores the relationship, if any, between Canadian Studies, Black Studies and Black diaspora discourse in this country. It is an attempt to elaborate a sustainable place in Canadian Studies for Blackness. Mary Ann

Shadd Cary acts as our intellectual guide on this elaboration. On this front, several issues are noteworthy: first, Shadd Cary occupies a very small place in Canadian Studies and is largely absent from Canadian feminist scholarship (Bristow et al 1994; Almonte 1998). By contrast, she enjoys a place of importance within African American studies, in particular African American feminist historiography (Ferguson 1998; Peterson 1995; Yee 1992; Rhodes 1998). That she eventually left Canada and returned to the USA is also of concern to me. All these points raise important questions about the place that Black Canadians occupy in the national imagery.

In the context of Black Canadian political cultures, figures like Shadd Cary should be important not only as historical heroes/heroines who engaged in struggles for liberation and self-determination. Such figures should signal in clearly pedagogical ways how to be part of the collective Black struggle and still retain an important sense of Black difference. A figure like Shadd Cary should haunt our deliberations on how we envision the future of our nation and, as Anne McClintock writes, wonder how "nationalism is implicated in gender power" (1995, 353). Shadd Cary articulated her position on emigration and immigration in a period that was substantively different from our own and to do so she had to oppose prominent male abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass. I believe her analysis remains relevant for our present circumstances.

I try to think with and alongside Shadd Cary as a way to make sense of the space, place and significance of Blackness in Canada and of the place and space of Canada in the Black diaspora. To do so, I address both the limits and the possibilities of developing stronger links between Canadian Studies and Black Studies. To announce the impossibility of Black/Canadian Studies is to actually assert its very possibilities. I assert its possibility, in relation to the specificity of the nation, but also, in tension with a sensibility which rests beyond national confines - what we might call a diaspora sensibility.

## A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SHADD CARY

Mary Ann Shadd Cary. Teacher, Mother, Journalist, Editor, Activist/Feminist, Lawyer. Shadd Cary arrived in Canada in 1851, one year after the passage of the *Fugitive Slave Act* of 1850 in the USA. The *Fugitive Slave Act* made it "legally" possible for both freed Black people and fugitives to be (re)enslaved. Shadd Cary was born in Wilmington, Delaware. She was the oldest of thirteen children of Harriet and Abraham Shadd. Both parents were activists who used their home as a station for the Underground Railroad.

Mary Ann Shadd attended a Quaker school and began a teaching career in 1839 which lasted until 1850, during which she taught in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York, before moving to Windsor, Canada West. In 1851 she resumed her teaching in Canada, establishing a school for children and their fugitive parents. Shadd Cary believed that the formal education of ex-slaves was one of the most important aspects of liberation and key to eventually obtaining citizenship rights. Partially funded by the American Missionary Association, her school was in existence until about 1853 when the Association withdrew funding. Shadd Cary's school was publicly known as a non-segregated school in a time when schools were segregated. Shadd Cary did not resume teaching until 1859; she taught until 1863 in Chatham from where she later returned to the USA as the only Black woman to work as a recruiter for the Northern forces in the Civil War.

While in Canada, Shadd Cary published and edited *The Provincial Freeman*, an abolitionist newspaper. It provided her with a venue to articulate political and cultural concerns and engage in dialogue and debate with her opponents. Shadd Cary published and edited *The Provincial Freeman* from 1854-1855. She was the first Black woman in North America to publish and edit a newspaper. After the American Civil War, Shadd Cary became the first woman to enter Howard University law school. At the age of 60 in 1883 she received her law degree, being among one of the first Black women to do so. She died in 1893.

As this brief biographical sketch suggests,

Shadd Cary, like other committed activists, stands out, both in her own time and in historical time.

### THINKING WITH AND ABOUT SHADD CARY

Where does Shadd Cary take me? Why has she attracted the attention of so few scholars? I think that my own fascination for Shadd Cary has as much to do with her biography as it has to do with appreciating her as an exceptional woman and activist in the past or the fact that her ideas refuse to be contained by historical time. Shadd Cary's thinking signals for us the limits and excesses of historical time. She stands as an important figure both in time and across time. This is why we need Shadd Cary now. Her contemporaneity cannot be overlooked.

The cultural and literary critic Homi Bhabha, in trying to demonstrate how the past and the present rely intricately on each other, argues that our return to the past is always implicated in our thinking about the present:

Being in the "beyond," then, is to inhabit an intervening space, as any dictionary will tell you. But to dwell "in the beyond" is also, as I have shown, to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human, historic commonality; *to touch the future on its hither side*. In that sense, then, the intervening space "beyond," becomes a space of intervention in the here and now. (1994, 7)

Shadd Cary as symbol often appears to be beyond us - outside our reach - only existing as an important "past" figure. This is especially so when we consider her as an important thinker and, as African American feminist historian Carla Peterson put it, a "doer of the word." In Shadd Cary's time to be a doer of the word was to resist the gender norms of the period, and holding such a stance brought numerous political pitfalls for Shadd Cary (Rhodes 1998). But I suggest that Shadd can help us

to think about Blackness in Canada. A number of Black feminists historians in Canada are doing the important work of restoring Shadd Cary to her place in the historical record and I want here to discuss how her intellectual contributions might inform our contemporary discussions and dialogues. Her public intellectual role and the consequences she suffered as a result of her political struggles offer us ways of thinking about Blackness and femaleness together.

Given this, I insist on reading Shadd Cary as a figure of the in-between. By this I mean that she sits between Canada and the USA; she sits between race and gender in her thought and actions; she sits between Canadian Studies and Black Studies; and for my purposes, she sits between lack and desire. These in-between positions of Shadd Cary are indicative of the sensibilities of Black Canadian-ness. Blackness in Canada is fashioned by and constituted via the in-between positions, utterances and desires of multiple identifications (Walcott 1997). These identifications are both locally and nationally constituted and transnationally apparent. Shadd Cary occupied and represents them all. She was tactician of the in-between. Carla Peterson in her discussion of Shadd Cary's work writes that she "appears to have been impatient with boundaries of all kinds, repeatedly attempting to transcend, if not erase, them" (1995, 99). Peterson's observations and her assessments of Shadd Cary are clearly borne out in the latter's letters to her various peers (Ripley 1986). Peterson writes:

Yet given the attitude of both the dominant culture and the Black male elite toward Black women, Shadd Cary found herself time and again forced to confront boundaries of race, gender, and even nationality. Both her social ideology and her cultural practice came to function, then, as instruments through which she attempted to deconstruct, manipulate, and reconfigure boundaries in order to bring "the desired end" of racial uplift. (1995, 99)

Shadd Cary's positions on the limitations of

boundaries are and were very clear. She refused the category of race outright. She preferred to think in terms of "complexional character." Her emigration to Canada was in fact partly motivated by the continuing legal designations of race in the American context and not only by her resistance to the continuation of slavery.

However, Shadd Cary's most enduring and pedagogic insights remain in her articulations concerning emigration and the various possibilities for a Black homeland. She participated in and helped to fashion the debate on emigration with her 1852 *A Plea for Emigration*. In what appears to be one of the many instances of Shadd Cary's challenging of borders, she had her pamphlet printed by a White American printer. This action led her peer, Henry Bibb, to publicly chide her. In the pamphlet, Shadd Cary argues for emigration to Canada West as opposed to Haiti and Africa, the places others involved in the colonisation movement considered more suitable for Black migration. She responded with:

We go further, we want that the colored man should live in America - should "plant his tree" deep in the soil, and whether he turns white, or his neighbors turn Black by reason of the residence, is of no moment. He must have his rights - must not be driven to Africa, nor obliged to stay in the States if he desires to be elsewhere. We confess to their views as objectionable, as we know them to be, but this does not close our eyes against the "humbug" connected with this abolition reform, some phases of which would cause a worm-eating New Hollander to hide his head from very disgust.

(Ferguson 1998, 217-18)

She firmly believed in a Black presence in North America and saw North America as a "home" for what we might call the complexionally different. Shadd Cary wrote of the climate, farming, churches and the various resources that immigrants would require to successfully resettle. She acknowledged that prejudice existed in Canada West, but

suggested that the possibilities for citizenship there were greater than in the USA and in the other locales (Africa, Haiti, South America, Mexico and parts of the then British West Indies [Jamaica]) being discussed as sites for migration. Clearly, Shadd Cary is making an argument for choice as opposed to geographic place.

### A HOUSE FOR BLACKNESS: CANADIAN STUDIES AS "HOME"

Currently it might be argued that Blackness in Canadian Studies occupies the place of the repressed; in particular, a sustained theoretical and critical discourse centred on Black Canada within the contexts of Canadian Studies is absent. Yet Blackness keeps returning to complicate what Canada is and Canadian Studies aids in the repression of Blackness. I note a few random examples of wilful attempts to make the Black presence invisible in Canada: the long and now broken silence in St. Armand, Quebec concerning the slave cemetery almost ploughed over, which the locals call "nigger rock;" the destruction of the community of Africville in Nova Scotia in the 1960s; the demolition of Hogan's Alley in Vancouver in the 1960s; and in Ontario, the changing of the name of Negro Creek Road to Moggie Road in 1996. Attention to these moments or incidents would critically reshape Canadian history and reform Canadian Studies in ways that might cement Blackness within the national imagery.

Consequently, one might argue that a curious void occupies Canadian Studies. In relevant books and journals, individual essays on specific Black texts, or essays on specific Black contexts, speak to and of Blackness in Canada. And yet, the history of Blackness in Canada remains largely ignored in Canadian Studies. As any survey of major journals in the field will demonstrate, Blackness in Canada is considered a recent addition. However, by recovering and incorporating the thinking of figures like Shadd Cary we can disturb and disrupt the myth of Blackness as something recent to the nation.

Richard Almonte, the editor of the most

recent publication of Shadd Cary's *A Plea for Emigration* poses some crucial questions for Canadian Studies and Shadd Cary's place within it. He argues persuasively that Shadd Cary's book belongs to the tradition of "the settlement journal." He writes:

In the same year that Shadd published her book in Detroit, another immigrant to Canada, Susanna Moodie, published her settlement journal, *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852), in London, England. Moodie's sister, Catherine Parr Traill, continued this trend two years later with *The Female Emigrant's Guide* (1854), which in later editions was renamed *The Canadian Settler's Guide*. (1998, 26)

Almonte also notes that: "the importance of the settlement journal or emigrant's guide depends on the audience intended." It is not difficult to see why Moodie and Parr Traill are canonised in Canadian Studies and Shadd Cary is not. Black people from the time of Mattieu da Costa and Olivier Le Jeune have not been an integral part of how we imagine who a Canadian is (Winks 1997; Hill 1992). To seriously consider Shadd Cary as an instrumental part of the Canadian Studies canon would necessitate rethinking our understanding of national formation. It would also place matters of gender (or rather, womanhood) as a central problematic of nation building. This in turn would require a revision (at both the historical and contemporary levels) of what we understand the Canadian nation to be.

My concern is not solely with absence as the site/cite for correcting a wrong. I want to read into the void where Black Canadian expressive political cultures might rest. I want to offer a reading which might not only add to the configuration of Canadian Studies but also simultaneously point to why the modern nation and national designations remain troubling for diasporic Black peoples. It was the inability and unwillingness of Shadd Cary and many others to live with the vast contradictions of the emerging modern nation of the USA which brought them to

Canada. Similarly, it was the desire to find a home where the possibility of living a life of freedom would be allowed that led many of the ex-African Americans to return to the USA after the Civil War.

My question is this: can Canadian Studies as a multi-disciplinary, interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary configuration and practice tolerate the repetitive and disruptive returns of Blackness? I also want to ask other questions. What makes the study of nations special? What do the various policies of nations have to do with how we understand our local, national and transnational identities? What makes us a part of the nation and what causes us to reject the nation? What does Black womanhood do to how we understand the Canadian nation? And, what can Canadian Studies not bear to hear in regard to Blackness and the nation? I ask these questions in an effort to unsettle the scene of Canadian Studies, to undermine what we think we mean when we use the term Canadian Studies.

When Blackness works to elaborate Canadian-ness, Blackness simultaneously unsettles Canadian-ness. That is, Blackness interrupts "Canadian" scenes and simultaneously sets the stage for different enactments of Canadian-ness, enactments that challenge what Homi Bhabha calls "narrating the nation" (1990). Blackness is a counter-narration to the normalised image of Canadian as chromatically white. To consider Shadd Cary in Canadian Studies means that official narrations of the nation must be revised and restaged. Canadian Studies is implicated in reproducing particular narratives of the nation, narratives which offer normative notions of a phenotypically white nation - these narratives simultaneously address Blackness and repress it. Canadian Studies, then, is deeply implicated in many of the "technologies of otherness" (Golding 1997) which produce Blackness as a recent phenomena in the nation. But we now know that the recent-ness of Blackness is not the case.

Similarly, to consider gender within the contexts of national formation is to unsettle the nation. When gender is raced the disruption is massive. McClintock suggests the need for a more nuanced and complex theory of nationalism, one

that can make better sense of the gendering of the nation. Shadd Cary's womanhood and the ways in which her political speech acts were indicted, the ways in which her political acts were circumscribed, and the ways in which she had to both mobilise gender conventions and simultaneously resist those same conventions (Rhodes 1998), point to the way in which ideologies of gender work across time to restrict women's access to the public sphere. When it is a Black woman the restriction is in many ways more severe (Brown 1994) and yet Shadd Cary was able to continue to act within the contexts of white, masculinist restrictions.

When Blackness is addressed in Canadian Studies it occupies the place of "the special effect." That is, conversations concerning Blackness are never sustained - they arise and disappear, only to arise again, as if new. "Black" work which appears within the contexts of Canadian Studies comes to represent and symbolise the benevolence of the configuration - its elasticity - and thus supports the dominant nation-state narrative of Canada as a place for the special rescue of Blackness - the escape north to freedom. As a result, the narrative of the nation never changes; the normative narrative of nation represses the ways in which Blackness alters the national narrative of who belongs and how they belong. Despite the importance of this scholarship, the work has no sustained impact on thinking about and rethinking the very terms of Canadian Studies. The configuration of Canadian Studies, like the Canadian nation, can absorb and repress Black interruptions, disruptions and alterations and thus continue on as before; the configuration of Canadian Studies thus is a form of containment of Black Canadian-ness.

I turn now to the dynamic of repression and what I call its silent mode of address or silencing. All national narratives require repressions of some sort. To be more specific, the mutually agreed upon mode of the address of Blackness within Canadian Studies is to be disruptive and to claim the site or space of marginality. Marginality is the place from which Blackness must speak, but is it possible for

Blackness to speak from another place? The mode of the address as marginality is not possible without repression, for it is repression which makes marginality possible and common-sensical. That is, the repression of Blackness in Canadian Studies makes possible the mode of the address of marginality through its repeated and repetitive returns. A constant craving for recognition in the face of a continuous erasure.

But what happens when marginality is not claimed but the centre is assumed? Shadd Cary spoke from an assumption of belonging to the centre - she made her citizenship the basis of such an assumption. Her speech acts provoked unsettling moments for both Blackness and whiteness. Shadd Cary threw both race and gender into continual negotiation and negation. She offered a more inclusive elaboration of Canadian-ness. As a woman and public intellectual, Shadd Cary elaborated on the nation in terms of gender and race narratives that are normally repressed. An elaboration of Canadian Studies would necessitate a curtailment of the discourse of marginality and denial and instead suggest a self-assured Black Canadian presence. Shadd Cary is needed now - for she was never not self-assured. I suggest that a Black/Canadian Studies can proceed with little recourse to established or canonical Canadian Studies, but that this "Black Canadian" project in its self-assured-ness would eventually necessitate a rethinking of Canadian Studies as a whole, in a sense occupying the site of "outside" as opposed to a disruptive inside might move us a long way. Indeed, I want to highlight a fracture of diasporic sensibilities, which is the idea of looking beyond.

#### **NEW DIASPORA TIMES: CANADA'S PLACE**

Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* set a new and exciting agenda for Black diaspora studies. In it, Gilroy opened up a discussion concerning transnational Blackness; that is, Blackness as it transmigrates across various regions and nations and accesses a common history of transatlantic slavery and the conditions of a vicious modernism. This transmigration is both literal and metaphorical.

Gilroy grounds his work in the nineteenth century with readings of WEB Du Bois and Martin Delany and then he reads contemporary cultural practices and engagements from that place (as examples, the Fisk Jubilee Singers, Richard Wright, hip hop artists, and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*). *The Black Atlantic* has inaugurated a discussion of Black British and African American cultural and political identifications and cultural sharing, and yet, Gilroy's very fine study does have its weaknesses and lacunae (Edwards 1994; Reid-Pharr 1994).

His reluctance to seriously consider Black Canada and specifically the back and forth movements of Blacks across the Canada/USA borders of the nineteenth century is especially striking. This absence is important, given the fact that Gilroy spends considerable time analysing the philosophy of Martin Delany. Delany had immigrated to Canada in the 1850s and was a colleague of Shadd Cary. My considerations about Mary Ann Shadd Cary are, in part, a response to some of Gilroy's lacunae; it also differently genders Gilroy's rather masculine genealogy. I am, however, not antagonistic to Gilroy's project, I believe that it sets the stage for questions I wish to ask. I want to suggest that the complex mixture of Black communities in contemporary Canada offer much to consider on "new" diasporic discourses. This is especially so in the areas of cultural sharing, borrowing, creolization and governmental "support" of cultural difference - multicultural policies. In particular, border crossings which situate conversations and dialogues at the interstices of Black Studies and Canadian Studies are especially exciting to me. Both Black Studies and Canadian Studies have woefully neglected Black Canadian culture. Black Studies literature that recognizes Shadd Cary devotes little space to her time in Canada. Even Peterson's fine reading of Shadd Cary makes use of a trope of "tourist" to position Shadd Cary as not really Canadian. Except for a small number of Black women historians, Shadd Cary is largely ignored by Canadian Studies scholars. And, yet, I would argue that both configurations - Black Studies and Canadian Studies - are extremely important for developing ways of discussing Blackness in Canada, for

mapping the emergence of a Black diasporic community in Canada, a community whose identification demonstrates both the possibilities of nations and their limits.

In Jane Rhodes's *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century*, a biography which attempts to place Shadd Cary in her political and social context, the question of nation and national belonging is paramount. While Rhodes does address Shadd's years in Canada, she nonetheless recreates Shadd Cary as an American citizen. Rhodes does not adequately address how Shadd Cary's politics complicates the category of citizen. Note, for instance, how Rhodes discusses reports on Shadd Cary's decision to take out Canadian citizenship - "In 1865, Mary Ann Shadd Cary was not ready to relinquish her identity as a Canadian. Two months before Lee's surrender at Appomattox, she was issued a Canadian passport." Rhodes continues: "[Shadd] falsified her age - in 1865 she would have been forty-two years old - perhaps out of vanity, or out of desire to erase the years in Canada that had taken such a toll on her life. But at least for a while, she clung to the quasi-freedom and security that Canada had provided her for almost fifteen years" (1998, 162). By contrast, I would suggest that Shadd Cary lied for reasons that were intricately tied to her political stances. Indeed, Rhodes's interpretation reflects her attempt to reclaim Shadd Cary for a Black feminist US project as merely an ex-patriot American. To borrow a phrase from Antoinette Burton, Rhodes's project demonstrates how "a subject becomes nationalized" (1997, 238). And yet we might interpret Shadd Cary's taking out Canadian citizenship as a reflection of her continuing belief in Canada not merely as a sanctuary but as a serious and alternative homeland in North America. Such a view stresses Shadd Cary's politics and avoids the trap of reconstituting Shadd Cary as a US national subject. Shadd might have died in the US but, as a Black woman, she always found it deeply inadequate. As Burton points out, drawing on Gilroy, "the notion of deracinated, mobile subjects" is a difficult notion that few have engaged (1997, 232). Shadd Cary forces us to engage that notion.

## OUR MULTICULTURAL PRESENT AND FUTURE

What makes the contemporary diasporic community - or communities - in Canada unique and different from both the USA and Britain is our policy of official multiculturalism. Critiques of Canadian multiculturalism have largely emphasized two interrelated points: 1) multiculturalism only reduces cultures to their basic denominations and turns them into folklore, and 2) multicultural policies are wasteful government spending that does more to undo the nation than to unite it. Such positions do not account for the ways in which the articulation of non-official multiculturalism as a feature of Canadian society influences and organises our every day banal practices. This feature will become even more clear when 54 percent of people in Toronto are non-white. In the realm of the everyday practice, "multiculturalism" impacts on how we live our lives in the world.

In the United States, multiculturalism denotes a variety of positions, very few of which are "official." In Britain, since the demise of the Greater London Councils in the aftermath of Thatcherism, official multiculturalism is fast disappearing. In Canada, however, federal and provincial multicultural policies have had a tremendous impact on various Black communities. The policies and discourse of multiculturalism in Canada have allowed for a particular enactment of cultural difference which pre-empts any coherent or imagined national Black community. Such diversity distinguishes Canada from the USA, where a national Black community is imagined and sponsored by large lobby organisations such as the NAACP and the Urban League to promote "national Black interests." In Canada, Black communities proliferate; they consist of continental Africans, Afro-Caribbeans, Black Canadians and others who share certain histories, but who also claim divergent and sometimes antagonistic narratives of the past. Official multicultural policies in Canada bring these differences to the fore in ways that make for a rich understanding of Black Atlantic peoples. These distinctions also affect how different Black communities are incorporated into

the nation and what kinds of demands they make of the nation.

When we try to think about Canada within the context of current debates on Black diaspora, however, certain limitations become evident. I want to address these limitations and ponder how we might move beyond them in the postmodern era. Again here, thinking of Shadd Cary as an in-between figure who crosses borders is helpful. As a methodological and conceptual tool for thinking through the relations of Black peoples across and outside national boundaries, the term "diaspora" is a useful way of thinking about the movement of peoples in the "new" context of globalisation. Shadd Cary was fully aware of what was at stake when making claims and demands both within nations and across nations. She made demands not only of the emerging Canadian state, but also of the nation south of its border. Shadd Cary possessed a diaspora sensibility; as an exile, she did not leave history behind. Instead she organised, travelled, lectured, and edited and published the *Provincial Freeman*, an abolitionist newspaper whose title reflects its place of publication but also her concern with aiding in the abolition of US slavery.

If diasporas are possible only because of an original and long dispersal that eventually produced a notion of homeland and a possible return - if only imaginative - then other crossings also become central to thinking about theorising diasporas. The relationship between the back and forth movements of African Americans and Black Canadians, in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, has much to teach us. They demonstrate that for Black North Americans, the border between Canada and the United States was permeable. So too does Shadd Cary's resistance to any large Black emigration outside of North America. By ignoring how Canada formed Shadd Cary, Rhodes' book tells much about the place that Black Canada occupies in some versions of the US Black Studies project: the histories and cultural productions of Black Canadians have been displaced in conversations and dialogues concerning the Black Atlantic. A focus on Blackness in Canada which conceptually and theoretically embraces the tensions and contradictions of diaspora can add important new



dimensions to our thinking about outer-national and transnational Black cultural practices and identifications. It would in turn elucidate discourses of home, belonging, nation, Black Studies, Canadian Studies, Black cultural studies and theories of diaspora. It would illuminate how nation-state policies like official multiculturalism shape diasporic identifications and sensibilities. The centrality of crossings and recrossings to diasporic peoples' lives resists the seduction of national borders and boundaries - in effect these crossings can teach us something about how national discourses work.

I wish to focus on the ambivalent, the contradictory and the discontinuous moments of diaspora. A good example of the limits of diaspora discourse is Shadd Cary's critique and rejection of Haiti as a possible site for establishing a colony of Black Americans. Her position speaks to some of the current tensions and contradictions which arise in the context of new forms of imperialism. For example, in an editorial in the *Provincial Freeman* on the various schools of abolitionist thought, Shadd Cary asserts that she reserves the right to support only the principle of abolition without advocating a particular school. Such an articulation by Shadd Cary is insightful and important because it sets up a historical prerequisite for how Black Canadians can identify with African American political positions and still articulate their own positions as well. I want to strongly suggest that Shadd Cary spoke and acted from political conviction, desire and commitment and not from national yearning nor desire.

### **CONCLUSION: A HOUSE REDESIGNED?**

How do we maintain a discussion of Black differences in the context of increasing pressures to discuss Black diasporic connectedness at the expense of what might be crucial differences, especially within and between nations? To do so, we need Mary Ann Shadd Cary now more than ever. As the nation of Canada continues to try to figure out various possibilities, Black Canadians might use the insights and the creative

insubordinations of Shadd Cary to articulate our multiple and conflicting relations to the nation. Shadd Cary not only refused the category of nation but also rejected oppressive gender codes. She identified with the oppressed out of politics not biology.

The contemporary emergence and proliferation of Black Canadian literature, film, art, music and theatre requires that we think along with Shadd Cary about community. Her creative insubordination compels us to consider how we might better define community and make it work. Her public disputes with prominent Black abolitionists can be understood as her attempt to forge alliances based upon common political strategies and goals and not solely "race."

Shadd Cary can help us not only to refashion our understanding of Blackness in Canada, but also to redesign the very house that is the nation. My return to Shadd Cary is in part a need to invent a Black Canadian discourse that recognizes the continuous and discontinuous moments of Black Canadian life, that can produce a grammar that locates Blackness in a history longer than recent migrations (Walcott 1997, 133-49).

Sylvia Sweeney's recent film, *Breaking the Ice: The Mary Ann Shadd Story* (1997) takes its title from Shadd Cary's August 1855 "Adieu" article in the *Provincial Freeman*. Shadd Cary responded to public criticism over being a female newspaper editor in the following way: "...colored women, we have a word - we have 'broken the Editorial ice,' whether willing or not, for your class in America; so go to Editing, as many of you as are willing, and able, and as soon as you may, if you think you are ready" (Bearden and Butler 1977, 163).

Shadd Cary has much to teach us. Her politics, philosophy and notions of citizenship can help us create a "home" of possibilities. We need Shadd Cary now, in this moment of globalisation, and as we re-imagine who and what the Canadian might be.

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