

**RESILIENCE AND MEMORY IN THE POETICS OF AFRICADIA:
SYLVIA D. HAMILTON'S *AND I ALONE ESCAPED TO TELL YOU***
RESILIENCIA Y MEMORIA EN LA POÉTICA DE AFRICADIA: *AND I
ALONE ESCAPED TO TELL YOU* DE SYLVIA D. HAMILTON

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Abstract

Sylvia D. Hamilton's collection of poems *And I Alone Escaped To Tell You* (2014) revolves around the vindication of the little remembered legacy of slavery of Africadians – George Elliott Clarke's neologism to refer to African Canadians from the Maritime provinces – which acts as a metaphor of the silenced history of Black Canadians. To do so, Hamilton relies on memory work through the lens of resilience and, hence, participates in the recent post-trauma paradigm that is intent on highlighting resistance rather than victimhood. Thus, the resilient memory that emerges from the collection dismisses the position of victims for Africadians and, contrarily, focuses on the capacity to 'bounce back', to withstand historical adversities, to endure by being malleable and to adapt to conditions of crisis. Simply put, this resilient memory acts in the poems as the dignified exercise to keep on reinstating and vindicating the silenced history of Black Canada.

Keywords: Memory, Resilience, Africadians, Black Canada, Slavery

Resumen

El poemario *And I Alone Escaped To Tell You* (2014), de Sylvia D. Hamilton, trata sobre la vindicación del poco recordado legado de la esclavitud de los Africadianos – neologismo acuñado por George Elliott Clarke para referirse a los afrocanadienses de las provincias marítimas – que, al tiempo, sirve como metáfora de la historia silenciada de la esclavitud afrocanadiense. Para ello, Hamilton se centra en el estudio de la memoria a través del marco de la resiliencia y, así, participa en el paradigma post-trauma que intenta resaltar la resistencia ante el victimismo. Así, la memoria resiliente que emerge de la colección rechaza el victimismo para los Africadianos y, por el contrario, se centra en la capacidad de 'rebotar', de aguantar las adversidades históricas, de sobreponerse al ser

moldeable y adaptarse a condiciones de crisis. Esto es, esta memoria resiliente actúa en los poemas como un ejercicio digno de seguir reinstalando y reivindicando la historia silenciada del Canadá negro.

Palabras clave: Memoria, Resiliencia, Africadianos, Canadá Negro, Esclavitud

1. Introduction: The Memory of Africadian Literature

In his groundbreaking book *The Black Atlantic Reconsidered: Black Canadian Writing, Cultural History and the Presence of the Past* (2015), Winfried Siemerling traces back the origins of African Canadian literature and explains that “black writing in what is now Canada is over two centuries old and that black recorded speech is even older” (3). Certainly, the revision of slavery has brought to light the retrieval of slave narratives in Canada from the “Book of Negroes” to Black Nova Scotian accounts of slavery. Indeed, the “Book of Negroes” was an administrative but also a personal record that collected the individual transformation of black people who signed up as Black Loyalists in order to fight against the United States in search of their freedom during the American Revolutionary War. The evacuation of these Black Loyalists from New York to Nova Scotia linked Upper Canada with slavery and, therefore, with the written testimonies attached to it. As Siemerling states, “Nova Scotia is connected to several eighteenth-century slave and captivity narratives, written by black community leaders who described the province in their memoirs or took up residence there” (Siemerling 52). Hence, the testimony of black slaves in Canada constitutes the fundamental source to reclaim the importance of memory considering that “we have no other source, concerning our reference to the past, except memory itself” (Ricoeur 21). Also, this recovery of the memory of Canadian slavery has helped to remind “readers of aspects of Canadian history that were all but forgotten in the [...] burgeoning cultural nationalism” (Siemerling 6) thus featuring the differences between Canada and its southern neighbor. The late 1970s and 1980s witnessed the blossom of memory studies which propelled an instigated interest in black Canadians and their history. In this way, groundbreaking works such as Robin Winks’s *The Blacks in Canada: A History* (1971), James Walker’s *The Black Loyalists* (1976) and James W. St. G. Walker’s *A History of Blacks in Canada* (1980) linked the presence of African Canadians with memory work and the ongoing legacy of slavery. Therefore, it is clear that the importance of the memory and writing of Africadia has been paramount for the consolidation of black Canadian literature. African Canadian poet and scholar

George Elliott Clarke precisely coined the term Africadia – his neologism to refer to African Canadians from the Maritime provinces- in his long-term endeavor to bring together the collective experience of black Nova Scotian writers from the eighteenth-century to the present day. As Clarke himself states, “the Africadian literature commenced in 1785 when John Marrant, and African American Methodist missionary, who lived in Nova Scotia from 1785 to 1879, published his popular *Narrative of the Lord’s Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black*” (*Odysseys* 107). However, it is one hundred and eighty-nine years later when a corpus of narrative and imaginative rendition of the lives of Black Nova Scotians took shape in urgency in response to the historical events that suffused the lives of Africadians.

This is so because the retrieval of black memory and cultural celebration in Nova Scotia was for the most part triggered by the forceful erasure of the Africville community¹ between 1964 and 1970. In the tragedy’s wake, the texts produced by Black Nova Scotians materialized a coda to the lost community and instituted the “Africadian Renaissance” in the 1970s-80s with Frederick Wards’ *Riverslip: Black Memories* (1974) - and later on with *The Curing Berry* (1983)- and George Elliott Clarke’s *Saltwater Spirituals and Deeper Blues* (1983) as some of the primeval renditions. Since then, Africadian writing has been bent on providing new and corrective directions in the representation of a Nova Scotian reality that is “self-consciously Black” (Mannette 5) and determined to underscore “its persistent concerns: liberty, justice, and faith” (*Odysseys* 108) through a constant exercise of memory work. This move coincides with the shift, within postcolonial studies, towards the field of social history and to its focus on the Foucauldian “counter-memory”. This new view of recollection paved the way to revisit memories that “do not fit the historical narratives available” (Medina 12) but are prone to bring forth the silenced “pasts for differently constituted and positioned publics and their discursive practices” (Medina 24). Africadian poet and filmmaker Sylvia D. Hamilton’s last book of poems *And I Alone Escaped To Tell You*, published in 2014, is a bright example of such continuous attempt. As a filmmaker Hamilton has revived the life of Black Nova Scotians in *Black Mother Black Daughter* (1989) and *Speak It! From the Heart of Black Nova Scotia* (1992) tackling issues such as racism, exclusion, class difference, poverty, and gender differences. Yet, in *And I Alone Escaped To Tell You*, Hamilton puts into motion her own claiming of the importance of memory as a notion of “collectivity”

¹ Africville was an African Canadian village located just north of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Founded in the mid-18th century, Africville became a prosperous seaside community, but the City of Halifax demolished it in the 1960s in what many said was an overt act of racism after decades of neglect and subjugation.

(“Visualizing” 214), just as she wrote it in her article “Visualizing History and Memory in the African Nova Scotian Community”.

In this sense, the collection offers a poetical account of the (hi)stories of black Nova Scotians ever since the first African American Loyalists arrived in Africadia and how they engendered a new narrative that would definitely reshape the reality of African Canadian historical and cultural discourse. Hamilton’s redemptive exercise to reclaim memory in her account of Africadian history provides a sense of national revision that validates George Elliott Clarke’s contention that affirms that “(i)t is impossible to divorce the Africadian Renaissance from nationalist thought” (*Odysseys* 117). Hence, Hamilton’s poems are created in a specific reclamation of memory linked to the intrinsic potential of resilience for they connect the reality of Africadians to what Clarke himself designates as “combative assertiveness” (*Odysseys* 117). In this light, the importance of memory in the poems revolves around the re-establishment of the history of a past denied or repressed and appears hand in hand with the concept of resilience aiming to foster “community consciousness” (Akyeampong 185) against the silencing of African Canadian (hi)stories.

2. Memory and Resilience

In the past decades, memory has been studied in relation to its potentiality to remember and re-examine traumatic events of the past. This is so because, as Iwona Irwin-Zarecka explains, “[t]o secure a presence for the past demands work-‘memory work’” (13). For the African diaspora in the Americas, this intersection between past and trauma pivots primordially around slavery and, for this reason, the memory work involves “a struggle against forgetting” though, at the same time, brings forth “the specter of a memory that would never forget anything” (Ricoeur 413). The ambivalence of this memory work for black people in America evolved into a traumatic memory premised on the difficult position between the wish to forget and the imperative to remember. Pierre Nora also participated in this debate and demanded the need to turn to memory props (*lieux de mémoire*) to replace and redefine the lost memories (*milieux de mémoire*) (7) in the attempt to revisit silenced histories. In this way, the memory work has been conjured up with a deep sense of resistance that has eventually favored the capacity of black people to contest and counteract their historical subjugation throughout time.

Recently, the focus on this ability to resist has determined a new path in the field of humanities that promotes a shift away from the trauma paradigm toward a recent, post-trauma paradigm that manifests itself most vividly in the concept of

resilience. Among the potential meanings and plausibilities of trauma, resilience is being praised as the quality that individuals, communities, and societies must hold in order to endure and thrive in a world of ubiquitous risk and ongoing crisis. However, resilience is not and cannot be altogether detached from the trauma paradigm. In fact, Michel Basseler suggests that resilience is a key element in this current reorientation of trauma narratives' production. Thus, resilience is also linked to traumatic memory because "[s]peaking about resilience in a "post-trauma age" ...does not imply the end of trauma, but...[it] means to foreground the values that are attached to trauma, as well as the meaning that can be (and frequently are) made of traumatic experience" (Basseler 16-17). Indeed, in her essay "The Site of Memory" Toni Morrison alluded to the resilient nature of black slaves' memory as the reason of their ontological and historical survival (90-93). Therefore, resilience becomes a necessary part for the enactment of memory work because, as Irwin-Zarecka puts it, "[w]hen groups whose experience had long been excluded from societal record fight against being "forgotten", they are redefining that experience from one that did not deserve recording to one that does" (116).

This alluring capability of resilience is able to bespeak and trace the endurance of humans because it can be well applied to the multifarious ways in which not only "subjects come into being" but also "are maintained" (Bracke 53). In order to do so, though, subjects need to focus on a sense of resilience bathed in a "culture of memory...that moves from the individual to the collective... [as] a part of a social project of hope and resistance" (Baccolini 520). This project of resilient memory fits perfectly for the African diaspora in America since the pairing of memory and resilience is profoundly compromised in a capacity to thrive that, down the line, becomes a tacit "agreement on how to go forward" (60), as Susie O'Brien reminds us. This precise resilient reading of memory work is conjured up in Sylvia Hamilton's *And I Alone Escaped to Tell You*. Considering that Hamilton herself has declared that "history is present" ("Visualizing" 215), since its unrelenting characteristic is to keep on moving, her collection of poems participate in the aforementioned move from the trauma paradigm to the resilient narratives of endurance and survival by means of discharging a journey that aims to unlock the door of Canada's silenced memory. On this wise, the volume spans the history of African Canada by undertaking the task of offering a lyrical account of the life of black slaves in Nova Scotia and Brunswick through the routes of Black Loyalists right to the Black Refugee Period (1812) and up to the present day. In so doing, Hamilton's poetics gets engaged in the restorative nature of black Canadian writing of "presenting the past" (Siemerling 11), to use Siemerling's way of putting it, by setting forth a sense of memory deeply infused with resilience since it needs the collaborative exercise of a group of people who share a past of common experiences. In what follows I aim to analyse how an array of poems

within Hamilton's collection emphasize the resilient memory of Africadians by building on the traumatic legacy of slavery and migration of black Canadians to focus on their capacity to endure through their own restorative account of (hi)stories. The use of this resilient memory plays on the ontological nature of resilience, which means "to leap back, rebound" (Fraile-Marcos 1), to reclaim and reinstate the unvoiced history of Canadian slavery in order to call to mind the fact that "Canadian history is also black history" (Siemerling 8). In so doing, Hamilton's poetics revisits the legacy of slavery in Canada using resilience and memory as tools of resistance and dignity to join Stuart Hall's wish to readdress and "restore an imaginary fullness or plenitude" that might emerge "set against the broken rubric of our past" (Hall 225).

3. Resilient Memory in *And I Alone Escaped To Tell You*

If the concept of resilience can be defined as a "process encompassing positive adaptation within a context of significant adversity" (Luthar et al. 248), a restorative ethos deeply ingrained with it is at the core of Sylvia D. Hamilton's *And I Alone Escaped To Tell You*. The structure of the book bears particular significance for the collection since it is divided in three parts and directs readers to the biblical discourse of the jeremiad rhetoric tradition that black authors have used in North America. Aiming to find an ideological solution to slavery and exclusion, black slaves resorted to the Bible and to the jeremiad rhetoric to launch her critique against racism. This jeremiadic lament and condemnation became a warning and urgent exhortation to both admit the nation's downfall and incite it to change². The direct influence of the jeremiad as a political instrument aimed at acting upon reality was issued in three steps: "citing the promise; criticism of present declension, or retrogression from the promise; and a resolving prophecy that society will shortly complete its mission and redeem the promise" (Howard-Pitney 8). In this key, the three steps of the jeremiad discourse got imbibed in black culture as a way to exemplify their path towards recognition and citizenship. Interestingly, Sylvia D. Hamilton revisits this spiritual exercise through a transnational lens since she transports the legacy of this black jeremiad practice to

² Black scholar David Howard-Pitney notes the political implications of the spiritual demand and its resilient nature when he explains that "the term Jeremiad, meaning a lamentation or doleful complaint, derives from the Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah, who warned of Israel's fall and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by Babylonia as punishment for the people's failure to keep the Mosaic covenant. Although Jeremiah denounced Israel's wickedness and foresaw tribulation in the near-term, he also looked forward to the nation's repentance and restoration in a future golden age" (6).

the Canadian experience and in so doing expands the oppressive ramifications of slavery and does away with the deceitful myth of Canada as Canaan or the Promised Land.

Following this spiritual rendition of identity-building that characterizes the jeremiad rhetorical tradition, Hamilton's collection is divided in three sections: section one features poems that concentrate on the forced arrival of black slaves in North America, section two is made up by five short poems that focus on the importance of the identity-building process, and section three reflects contemporary portrayals of African Canadians in a "strange land". It is apt to use this phrase because the collection drinks from the jeremiad discourse and opens with two epigraphs from the Bible that set the tone of the poems and envision Canada as a hostile land. The two biblical verses that frame the book are Isaiah 29:4 and Job 1:15 and both talk about survival and the act of storytelling as a means of passing on memory and testimony. Indeed, Isaiah's words: "from the earth you shall speak, from low on the dust your words shall come" (Hamilton, *Alone* 8) and Job's musings: "they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword and I alone escaped to tell you" (Hamilton, *Alone* 8) highlight the importance of storytelling as the way to pass on memories and the idea of resisting, to cultivate resilience, in order to survive (as the title of the collection, coming from the biblical quote, attests). That Hamilton has accurately chosen prophet Job's words is by no means fortuitous. The passage is centered on the moment in which Job's dispossession is meant to be disputed by turning away from suffering. At this point of his biblical narrative, he does not even attempt to answer the arguments of his counselors, but simply cries out, heavy with grievance and groaning in their presence whilst he also reasserts his longing to find God and presents his case to find an answer and to resist in search of his redemption. The citation encapsulates, then, Hamilton's intention in her collection of poems: how to expose and analyze the suffering of Africadians but also their resistance in Canada.

In this way, the epigraphs appear to be highly revealing for they not only frame the poems but also set their tone in motion and inform the readers that "the most obvious way in which memory is incited, formed and complemented is through stories" (Tally 39). Moreover, in line with Ricoeur, the collection feeds on the idea of adding the importance of resilience to keep on uncovering the memories that derive from the "unofficial" history and that need to be handed down from generation to generation (qtd. in Blight 52).

The poem that opens the collection is entitled "The Passage", a title that contains in itself the whole story. The powerful words that shape up the poem are a direct reference to the painful voyage that African slaves had to endure when

they were forcibly brought to the so-called New World (a world that included Canada when it wasn't even Canada). To illuminate vividly the atrocious experience of black slaves, the poem is told in majestic plural. However, even though the poem is prefaced by an epigraph that reads "Voyage through death to life" (Hamilton, *Alone* 9), it falls within what Fleming and Ledogar have perceived as "community resilience", a type of endurance that envisions resilience on recovery. Indeed, through the poem Hamilton prescribes this dark episode as the open wound in the conscience of people from African descent in North America: "We did not know the future would not be ours. We fought. And we fought" (Hamilton, *Alone* 9). The composition resorts to memory by using biblical imagery and focusing on the shared experience of Jewish people escaping from their captivity in Egypt. In this case the enacted memory turns black slaves into myths whilst it emphasizes the doom-like atmosphere of the passage – "like a buzz of locusts invaded our sleep" (Hamilton, *Alone* 9) – in a direct reference to the biblical plague – and propels the transfiguration of black slaves in the figure of Christ, the ultimate redeemer: "blood rushing from the hole in our chests" (Hamilton, *Alone* 9). This move fits in the diasporic memory that James Clifford explains, which emphasizes the resilient nature entrenched in it for it is a type of memory that "blends together both roots and routes to construct [...] forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside" (qtd in Akyeampong 185). Building upon this, it is equally important to note that the sense of communal resilience is understood in religious terms because, as George Elliott Clarke explains, "Africadian cultural nationalism enacts the transubstantiation, not the obliteration, of religious feeling, that profound emotion whose genealogy is located in the myths of the collective" (*Odysseys* 117) that, down the line, manifests the resilient nature adhered to the cultural continuum of the jeremiad tradition on which Hamilton's collection impinges. Thus, the poem's ending models a cultural resistance that reverses the racist dichotomy that reads African slaves as pagan people and, therefore, belonging to darkness and savagery. In "The Passage" the enslavers are the ones to be put in the shadow of history: "the sons of darkness stole our children's tomorrow" (Hamilton, *Alone* 9).

In the poem "Tracadie" which also belongs to section one, a domestic slave also relies on spirituality to uphold a resilient strand that speaks about a New World that has historically disregarded black bodies and cornered them in the margins:

This land does not forgive.
We cut our way in tangled forests.

Backs ache, hands, feet bruised, bodies broken.
 Ma name me Manuel. He call me John.
 Write my name on his death paper with his bed,
 pinchbeck watch, gold seal, silver spectacles – one glass missing
 (Hamilton, *Alone* 13).

There is room for amelioration in the ending because, according to the slave's voice, his master "pass on my body to his son, not my spirit" (Hamilton, *Alone* 13) which, not only proves that "another dimension linked to resilience is self-enhancement" (25), as George Bonnano notes, but also displays the bond between resilience and religion just as we read in a final stanza that recasts the epigraph of the biblical Epistle to the Romans to publicly assess the importance of memory: "It already asleep with the ancestors" (Hamilton, *Alone* 13). The poem presents a resilient nature based on the diasporic memory of the African tradition that constitutes a way to challenge the historical exclusion of black bodies. According to the African tradition, the recently dead remain in the Sasa in which they "are still part of their human families, and people have personal memories of them" (Mbiti 82). The Sasa, or the figure of the ancestors, become part of the "collective immortality" (Mbiti 82). By reclaiming this immortal connection with the ancestors, the poem enacts this resilient memory that demands a specific way to remember because "they [ancestors] do not simply imply continuity with the past but explicitly claim such continuity" (45), as Paul Connerton clarifies in *How Societies Remember* (1989). That the poem focuses on this continuity – "a longer death or longer to remember my death" (Hamilton, *Alone* 13) – exemplifies this union between memory work and resilience as the fittest way to re-address Canadian history.

One of the most innovative poems of the collection is called "The Ledger". As the title suggests this poem clearly hangs on a process of memory work and exposes an array of numerous names from various archival records: The Book of Negroes, the Black Refugee List and also names of enslaved people from a text called Slavery in Canada. The poem washes over two pages and it is also present in the cover of the collection. Hamilton admits that she has only used the names related to hurtful negative descriptors, that is, she wanted to highlight the infamous way in which black people were objectified. The fact that this poem eventually configures the book design is definitely a deliberate move. Hamilton planned to give black people a sense of visibility, a visual way to offer resistance to invisibility and erasure which, at the same time, acts as a rereading of the aforesaid Book and List. Again, there is no individuality but a whole bunch of names and experiences that help to reveal Canada as a slave society, something that has not been very much discussed until very recently. The poem's pre-eminence on just

names is a reversal of the importance of renaming for black slaves. Once brought to the plantations their names were removed and they were either renamed or simply called by letters. Contrarily, Hamilton's re-enactment of memory and resilience is based on printing the book with their names and surnames to not only give them their place and presence in history but also to showcase their importance in the process of repairing the forgotten history of slavery in Canada.

The poem "Melville Island" illustrates this view of Canada as a slave society by means of telling the inclemencies and harshness that black people encountered when they settled in Nova Scotia at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The island was used as a receiving depot for black refugees escaping slavery in the United States and soon became the epitome of the meagerness that was about to define the life of this black Nova Scotians. The poem opens with an epigraph that shows the resilient nature of spirituality despite the grueling weather conditions: "Silenced by the snow they wondered if even God had finally forsaken them" (Hamilton, *Alone* 22). Melville Island turns then into a rocky prison where former slaves find no solution of improvement in this supposed New Canaan. This echoes, curiously, the wasteland landscape of destruction and deletion from which the jeremiad discourse of denouncement emerged. Nova Scotia—rightly renamed as "nova scarcity" (Hamilton, *Alone* 22) for these new citizens—changes its meaning from the land of freedom to the land of a freezing reality where hope and resilience represent the only way of survival and resistance: "if we still here in spring, we try again" (Hamilton, *Alone* 22). Hope is here understood in resilient terms since it "strengthens" the potential of "individual sturdiness" (Fraile-Marcos 1). The hopeful blossom of their subjectivity is therefore understood through the use of resilience as a "positive emotion" (Bonnano 26) that composes a memory that clings on to positive wishes: "we been up and sold, we invented temporary" (Hamilton, *Alone* 22). This temporary would be the way of coping, to *resile* to negativity with the hope of a better tomorrow.

After some poems that keep on voicing the testimonies of the endurance and faith to advance in Canadian soil by some black refugees, the second section of the book touches upon the concept of identity and resistance in the twentieth century. This section also follows the path of resilient memory as shown by the aforementioned biblical quote by Job that opens the collection. In this part, we read about the way in which art has effaced the presence of black people as well as how history books have neglected the history and stories of blacks in Canada. From this second part, I am going to focus on the poem "At the Museum". In it, a black Canadian teacher brings her students to the Little Schoolhouse Museum. The class is lining up to see Hitler's Jawbone in display when they bumped into an exhibition about the Middle Passage. In this new exhibition two young black

boys in a canvas, Bunga and Simba, receive the teacher's attention. This moment brings forth the retrieval of personal memories. Unable to pass on the teachings of the history of African Canadians to the students, the pictures of the two young black slaves act as a reminder so that the teacher can reconsider:

They look out at me
 With simply inquiring stares,
 Wondering where I've been
 These past forty years.
 They don't recognize me at all.
 I've changed (Hamilton, *Alone* 53)

The powerful images of the exhibition of slavery in Canada act as a re-enactment of the memory that should be salvaged: "I tell them I know. I know now what I didn't know then" (Hamilton, *Alone* 54). That the class finds the exhibition on slavery while seeing an exhibition on Hitler and the Holocaust is definitely a propitious move. Indeed, the episode of slavery in the Americas has often been referred to as the "Black Holocaust" in diaspora studies. Out of this, a specific diasporic memory has intended to revisit slavery and its aftermath aiming to remind contemporary generations of the importance of "cultural survivals" (Akyeampong 193) in the fight for equality. Surely, for any discussion of survival, memory is key. In the poem, the memory that the pictures bring forth relates to this "diasporic survival" (Tally 39) that has prevented black Canadians to obliterate their origins in their country. Consequently, the two slave boys not only speak to the teacher but to the whole class. In so doing, these pictures become an act of resilience themselves since they bring the memory of slavery to the present and prevent the students from forgetting the history of their own country. As in the previous poem, the reenactment of the resilient memory is filled with the "hope [...] to produce a successful outcome" (O' Brien 45). Also, the paintings encompass a resilient memory that is understood through the consciousness they enact as a piece of art. In this case, the pictures facilitate the diasporic memory infused with resilience that the teacher was lacking because, as Susan Sontag noted, art is "an expression of human consciousness, consciousness seeking to know itself" (1). This is why, in the end, the paintings about slavery enlighten the teacher's mindset to explain their meaning to the students and to finish the visit with an inviting conclusion: "I wish I could take them with me" (Hamilton, *Alone* 54).

The last section of the collection relies again on a personal voice that utters the histories and stories of black Canadians and their own sense of belonging. The poem called "Crazy Black Luce" is a suitable example of this. In this composition, a black woman who has migrated from the Caribbean is utterly misunderstood and

left aside in Canada. In this vein, the poem echoes Makeda Silvera's seminal short story "Caribbean Chameleon", included in her collection *Her Head a Village* (1994), since both stories speak about the difficulties of accommodating diasporic subjectivities into the Canadian realm. They also converge in presenting resilient women who despite the mockeries and setbacks, hold on to their own sense of identity skipping this way what Sarah Bracke has named as a "process of subjectification" focused solely on a "cultural project bent on reshaping the structure of social relationships and subjectivities" (62). Instead, Luce is remembered because of the flaunting of her folkloric Caribbean garments regardless of the incomprehension that labeled her as crazy for doing so: "Here she comes/ jingling jangling/ slapping her worn-out tambourine/ Crazy Luce. Coloured ribbons floating from her hair. Round rainbows round growing from her dress...Others say she's crazy, keep away from her. Look at her dress: covered with shiny rainbow rounds" (Hamilton, *Alone* 62). Sylvia Hamilton's pretext through Luce is to pay homage to what Winfried Siemerling calls the black Atlantic spirits which, in relation to Canada, "challenge any singular perspective and account" (30). Lucy is remembered as a flamboyant presence of a black Canadian who came from the Caribbean and tried to make it in Canadian soil. However, by focusing on the legacy of the Black Atlantic, the poem vindicates the importance of the diasporic memory and its input into what Rinaldo Walcott has called "black Canadas" (151) or the different ways in which African Canadians might find legitimization in the nation-state. Thus, despite the lack of appreciation, Luce accentuates positivity, inclusion and foregrounds the ethics of being yourself boasting about diasporicity and the different ways of inhabiting Canada. Also, Lucy resorts to the memory of spirituals – "sang when no one else would sing" (Hamilton, *Alone* 62)- in a clear allusion to slavery and the importance of spirituals and music for the black slaves' resilience and eventual survival. Therefore, Lucy's diasporicity and her sense of resilience within integration, according to the poem's serves takeaway, is what theorists Runner and Marshall propose in the current second wave of the metatheory of resiliency: "coming to know how you think, who you are spiritually, where you come from, and where you are going" (14).

Another interesting poem in this last section is the one titled "Potato Lady". It recounts the daily routine of a woman cooking in her kitchen and also retrieving the memory of slavery in present-time. The poem mentions Mary Postell for readers to recall her story. Postell's poor conditions stem from the racism that resulted from slavery and her work as a potato seller needs to be understood as a product of her time since despite being a free black Loyalist in Nova Scotia she had to go to court twice to fight for her freedom. Notwithstanding her resilient demeanor to "thrive in the face of adversity while keeping [her] essence" (Fraile-

Marcos 2) Postell was unable to succeed and, after the second defeat, she was re-enslaved and sold to William Mangrum for the excruciating trade of one hundred pounds of potatoes. The unvoiced but ever-present inner space where women had been relegated to in the poem act as the perfect site to recapture a resilient memory linked to slavery. In fact, the excuse of the potato, the tuber that was worth the price of Mary Postell, unfolds succinctly the history of Canadian slavery. The use of the word “poised” (Hamilton, *Alone* 85) accentuates the fact that the history of this woman has been brought to the present and she is now ready, in this case, to lift the rug where the dark past of slavery has remained hidden.

Although the poems of the collection reflect Canada’s history of slavery and the subsequent difficulty of accommodating black people in the nation-state, Hamilton finishes her collection in a positive note by means of a bitty poem called “Solongone”. In it, the authorial voice reclaims the cultural legacy of the African diaspora through resilient memory and self-assertion. The poem recovers the matrilineal line of different black diasporic subjectivities with an aim to “think contrapuntally within and against the nation” (22), as Rinaldo Walcott would put it. Hamilton brings the collection to an end by presenting a black Canadian woman who states proudly her cultural heritage. As in “Potato Lady”, in this poem the legacy of slavery relies on black women’s subjectivity. Though she is Canadian, her sense of being is grafted within her through the diasporic memory: “So long gone. Still I remember” (Hamilton, *Alone* 90). Awakened, self-confident – “surging like an electric current” (Hamilton, *Alone* 90) – and in line with the resilient ethos that runs through the whole collection, the authorial voice reinterprets the painful past of her ancestors “across centuries” (Hamilton, *Alone* 90) to conclude positively that she now is – “I am” (Hamilton, *Alone* 90) – who they (interpreted as both her ancestors as well as the people from the nation that took her in) imagined. By ending the collection with this positive note the author validates the message uttered from the biblical epigraphs and concludes her poetic compositions couching them in the very essence of the jeremiad: resistance but also optimism, since the resilience attached to this rhetoric of self-assertion, Sacvan Bercovitch argues, lies in “its unshakable optimism” (6), that is, in the faith that contrition and reform will bring about a future golden age of respect thus pointing toward the alluded “redeem[ing] of the promise” (Howard-Pitney 8).

In so doing, Hamilton highlights the importance of memory departing from the trauma enclosed to it but emphasizing the importance and qualities of collective resilience in the process of memory work. This weight on resilient memory secures the importance of the effort and fight of black Canadians ever since they arrived in the country. This resilient memory becomes necessary because it is centered on the assertive belligerence and the resistance rather than

in the endured problems. This is so because, the resilience ethos of memory, in Irwin-Zarecka's words, "is not a given, not a "natural" result of historical experience. It is a product of a great number of people [...] securing public articulation of the past" (67). By titling the poem "Solongone", in one word, Hamilton puts together the experience of the black women who made it to Canada and suffered but resisted. The author brings them back –makes them "bounce back" (Basseler 26)– to manifest that the full picture of a country is "always constructed through its memory" (Hall 226). Accordingly, this last poem's politics of composure come full circle with the whole collection since it brings together the retrieval of the memory of slavery in Canada whilst, following the post-trauma paradigm, it stresses the optimistic capacity to thrive and resist of black people in the ongoing attempt to revisit and readdress the (hi)story of Africadia. In this way, Hamilton's collection of poems reframes the Africadian historical presence and "space of pain" (Walcott 49) to position the memory of Black Nova Scotians within the resilient paradigm that is currently reading their politics of recognition. Such politics are in tune with the continuous vindication of the "historical and cultural legacy of black communities that have been in Canada for generations" (Barrett 16), as Paul Barrett defends in his *Blackening Canada* which, together with Wilfried Siemerling's *The Black Atlantic Reconsidered*, revisit the memory work of African Canadians and bestow these new resilient understandings of the legacy of slavery and a readdressing of the history of Black Canada.

4. Conclusion

The selection of poems that comprise *And I Alone Escaped To Tell You* endeavor to give the historical aftermath of slavery events a human voice, blending a resilient approach to memory with experience and imagination to evoke and recover the lives of the early Black Nova Scotians and of the generations that followed. The poems rely heavily on synergic traits that transform the trauma associated to Africadian history into a vector of resilience by invoking a memory that can restore and eventually foster a rehabilitated version of the histories of African Canadians. The collection is thus premised on the idea that the specifics of a past denied or silenced are never laid to rest as long as the memory of such acts remains unaddressed, if not overlooked, which induced black Canadians to make use of memory work with an eye to foster self-assertion and an eventual healing process.

In this regard, and although for the literature composed by the African diaspora in North America the politics of memory has been in essence a political act for it is fundamentally retrieved from their traumatic experience under slavery,

Hamilton's poems span four centuries to focus on the particularity of the resistance and tenacity of black Canadians. In so doing, the collection, as it can be seen through the analysis of the selected poems, partakes in the post-trauma paradigm and focuses on the importance of a resilient reading of memory work to eschew the position of the victim and to uphold a sense of endurance and security as another way of resistance that can serve to revisit the legacy of slavery from the point of view of agency and dignity. Consequently, and building upon the memory work that ignited the interest in black Canadian studies, resilience and memory emerge hand in hand in the collection destined to restore the history of Africadians and to serve as assets able to salvage and readdress the little remembered presence of Black Canadians in the nation-state.

Thus, *And I Alone Escaped To Tell You* winds up being more than Hamilton's vindication of the place of African-descended people in the Canadian history. It is also another way to revisit, retell and acknowledge the legacy of slavery in Canada whilst admitting the importance of the Africadians' effort to assert their belonging and their sense of attachment that ultimately signifies their resistance for the establishment of African Canadianness. The refusal of victimhood, heavily instilled in resilient thinking and bathed in the jeremiad rhetoric that lies behind the spiritual nature of the collection, pervades the poems and concedes to the idea of retrieving memory through resilience as an act of historical reestablishment and as another way for Africadians to reclaim their legitimate sense of belonging. Hence, that importance of black memory reclaimed through the lens of resilience gives the poem's message and (hi)story the capacity to revisit African Canadians troubled history from a dignified sense of resistance since all their stories manage to 'bounce back', to withstand historical adversities, to endure by being adaptable and to adapt to conditions of crisis. In other words, the resilient memory acts for the poems of the collection as the dignified way to keep on reinstating and vindicating the silenced history of Black Canada.

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