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REVISITING MULTICULTURALISM: ANTI-BLACKNESS AND PRACTICES OF SOLIDARITY IN SHEILA MURRAY'S *FINDING EDWARD*[1]

SILVIA PÉREZ-CASTELO
Universidad de Oviedo, Spain
perezcsilvia@uniovi.es

Abstract: This article examines the limitations of Canadian multiculturalism through Sheila Murray's *Finding Edward* (2022), arguing that the novel exposes how institutional narratives of diversity obscure ongoing structures of anti-Blackness. While multiculturalism has often been celebrated as a model of inclusion, this study engages with its critical reassessment in Black Canadian studies to demonstrate how racial inequality persists despite its official discourse. Through a comparative analysis of two Black protagonists whose lives span from the 1920s to the present, the article shows how the novel represents both historical and contemporary forms of anti-Black racism. It further argues that *Finding Edward* foregrounds practices of solidarity and relational resistance that challenge the limits of multiculturalism, suggesting alternative modes of community formation beyond state-sponsored diversity. By bringing literary analysis into dialogue with critical race perspectives, this article contributes to ongoing debates on multiculturalism in Canada, highlighting the role of contemporary fiction in rethinking anti-racist strategies.
Keywords: *Finding Edward*; multiculturalism; racism; solidarity; anti-Blackness; resistance

REVISITANDO EL MULTICULTURALISMO: ANTINEGRITUD Y PRÁCTICAS DE SOLIDARIDAD EN *FINDING EDWARD* DE SHEILA MURRAY

Resumen: Este artículo examina las limitaciones del multiculturalismo canadiense a través de *Finding Edward* (2022) de Sheila Murray, argumentando que la novela pone de relieve cómo las narrativas institucionales de la diversidad ocultan las estructuras persistentes de antinegritud. Si bien el multiculturalismo ha sido a menudo celebrado como un modelo de inclusión, este estudio dialoga con su reevaluación crítica en los estudios afrocanadienses para demostrar cómo la desigualdad racial persiste a pesar de su discurso oficial. Mediante un análisis comparativo de dos protagonistas negros cuyas vidas abarcan desde la década de 1920 hasta la actualidad, el artículo muestra cómo la novela representa tanto formas históricas como contemporáneas de racismo. Asimismo, este análisis sostiene que *Finding Edward* pone en primer plano prácticas de solidaridad

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y resistencia relacional que desafían los límites del multiculturalismo, sugiriendo modos alternativos de formación comunitaria. Al poner en diálogo el análisis literario con perspectivas críticas de raza, este artículo contribuye a los debates actuales sobre el multiculturalismo en Canadá, destacando el papel de la ficción contemporánea en la reformulación de estrategias antirracistas.
Palabras clave: *Finding Edward*; multiculturalismo; racismo; solidaridad; antinegritud; resistencia.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article examines overt and covert expressions of racism in contemporary Canada, as well as the forms of solidarity and resistance that emerge against anti-Blackness, through Sheila Murray's *Finding Edward* (2022). Sheila Murray is a mixed-race English-born novelist and short fiction writer who migrated with her family to Canada as a teenager. Issues of race and identity are central to her work and are particularly foregrounded in *Finding Edward*. This novel narrates the story of Cyril, a Jamaican mixed-race young man who migrates to Toronto in 2012 in order to pursue higher education. Upon arriving in Canada, he must navigate education, migrant life, racism and alienation. A chance encounter with a photograph from 1922 changes his life: the image is a portrait of Edward, an abandoned mixed-race baby, in which Cyril sees a reflection of himself. As he learns more about Edward's story, he develops a growing sense of connection and embarks on a quest to uncover his life.

This article follows an interdisciplinary theoretical approach drawing on race, cultural and migration studies. Since the novel focuses on minority characters within a white-dominated society, it engages with key debates surrounding multiculturalism in Canada. Demographic and political multiculturalism have been one of the main characteristics of Canada as a settler nation-state, particularly since it became the first country to institutionalise policies aimed at recognising cultural diversity and promoting equality among different ethnic groups (Marger). However, it must be noted that Indigenous communities are not included within the framework of multiculturalism, as their status differs fundamentally from that of other minoritised groups. While multiculturalism is often presented as a policy designed to recognise and protect cultural diversity, it operates within a broader settler colonial context in which whiteness remains the normative centre (Wong and Guo). From a decolonial perspective, such frameworks may reproduce colonial patterns of power and knowledge by incorporating difference without fundamentally challenging the structures that sustain racial hierarchies

(Mignolo). In this sense, multiculturalism has been criticised for presupposing a dominant white national identity against which cultural difference is managed and accommodated. As a result, it risks obscuring the foundational violence of the Canadian settler state, which is predicated on the dispossession and elimination of Indigenous peoples (Chambers). This limitation is crucial when examining how racialised subjects are positioned within Canadian society.

Canadian multiculturalism has also been the source of multiple debates and controversies regarding the persistence of racism. In this context, as Sunera Thobani argues, multiculturalism can reinforce "the 'cultural and social fabric' of whiteness in the face of increasing non-white immigration" (157). For many racialised communities in Canada, neither equity, inclusion nor liberty have been fully realised under multiculturalism. Economic, social and political subjugation remain defining features of their lived experiences, particularly in the case of Black communities.

Despite the apparent advances associated with multiculturalism and anti-racist policies, it can be argued that racism continues to structure Canadian society in persistent ways. The novel's dual temporal framework is particularly significant in this regard: Edward lives most of his life prior to the institutionalisation of multiculturalism, whereas Cyril migrates to Canada in the 2000s – that is, during the last stage of multiculturalism. By placing these two trajectories in dialogue, the novel reveals both historical continuities and transformations in the operation of anti-Blackness. At the same time, the novel also gestures towards contemporary forms of resistance. In particular, the activism of recent years– exemplified in the novel mainly by a group of Black youth, to which Cyril belongs – suggests the possibility of meaningful social change. Recent efforts to establish alliances between Black and Indigenous forms of activism (see Chambers and Maynard) point towards forms of solidarity grounded in shared struggles against systemic oppression. Despite existing tensions, these movements increasingly collaborate towards abolition, decolonisation and the development of anti-colonial solidarities.

The novel therefore provides a valuable framework for examining alternative modes of human interaction, including diasporic alliances, community formation and forms of conviviality. Consequently, as this article argues, practices of solidarity may constitute a potential alternative to the limitations of multiculturalism, offering new ways of understanding social relations beyond state-centred models of diversity.

2. Multiculturalism in Canada: From Policy to Structural Racism. Solidarity as an Alternative

With the implementation of multiculturalism as official policy in 1971, Canada became an international referent in the promotion of pluralist societies and the defence of inclusivity. This policy played a crucial role in fostering the right to recognition and universal dignity, regardless of ethnicity, religion or cultural background (Taylor). Multiculturalism has aimed to construct a unified and inclusive national identity based on the coexistence of multiple cultures, promoting intercultural dialogue and mutual acceptance among ethno-cultural groups (Berry 38). This model has positioned Canada as a global example of how to manage diversity. However, these advances must be understood within the broader context of Canada as a settler colonial state, in which recognition is unevenly distributed. While migrants are incorporated into the national narrative of diversity, Indigenous communities remain structurally excluded from the framework of multiculturalism and its logic of recognition (Wong and Guo). As a result, the policy has been widely criticised for its significant blind spots and structural limitations.

Scholars have pointed out that multiculturalism can function as a divisive, essentialising and hegemonic framework (Fleras and Elliott). One of its most persistent shortcomings lies in its inability to address racism effectively. While multiculturalism has facilitated certain forms of integration, it has failed to ensure full inclusion, as racialised communities and Indigenous peoples have historically been excluded from meaningful participation in social and political processes. This exclusion contributes to ongoing experiences of alienation, reinforcing social fragmentation rather than achieving the promised ideals of equity and national cohesion (Fleras; Bannerji; Wong and Guo). Moreover, multiculturalism can be understood as a neoliberal and capitalist strategy that preserves the status quo and reinforces the dominance of whiteness within the settler state. Rather than fostering genuine cultural democracy, it often produces forms of ethno-racial stratification and shapes "the possibilities of multicultural affect and affiliation in troubling ways" (Vernon 94). In this context, racism does not always manifest as overt prejudice but is embedded within institutional, economic and political structures. As stated by Angela Davis, "we often tend to think of racism as attitudinal. We think about it as explicit — we don't necessarily also think about it as being embedded in social, economic and political structures" (n.p.).

This structural dimension is crucial for understanding contemporary racial inequality in Canada. For many racialised communities, and particularly for Black Canadians, neither equity, inclusion nor liberty have been attained. As Maynard argues, the "realities of ongoing Black subjection only remain more hidden from view" (77), reflecting the ways in which multicultural discourse can obscure systemic injustice. Economic, social and political marginalisation continue to shape Black life in Canada. Structural racism, hand in hand with neoliberalism, has impoverished racial minorities, placing them at a marginal position and augmenting wealth disparities. Regardless of their education and expertise, racialised individuals frequently encounter barriers in the labour market – experiencing discrimination in employment, promotion, or wages. Structurally-mandated poverty defines and constrains the lives of many members of the Black community, placing ethnic and racialized minorities in a disadvantaged and precarious (Butler, *Notes* 34) position. Economic violence (James) and subjugation remain a legacy of the colonial period – which for the Indigenous population, as several scholars attest (Maynard; Maynard and Simpson; Dylan et al.; Razack *Race, Space and the Law*; Razack, "Memorializing Colonial Power"), continues to be an ongoing process – and the system of slavery. These conditions are further exacerbated by limited access to housing, social services and state support. This condition of structural inequality produces differentiated forms of precarity, which, as Butler suggests, are unevenly distributed across populations and can shape both vulnerability and resistance (*Vulnerability in Resistance* 12).

In addition to economic marginalisation, structural racism significantly impacts education and professional opportunities. Racialised students often experience discrimination, stereotyping, violence and psychological harm within educational institutions. In the case of Black communities, these experiences are frequently shaped by enduring racial stereotypes that associate Blackness with lack of intelligence and inferiority, reinforcing systemic disadvantage.

Institutional racism is further reinforced through everyday practices of surveillance and policing. Black individuals are disproportionately targeted by law enforcement, subjected to racial profiling, and more likely to be stopped, questioned and subjected to violence – restricting their freedom of movement and hampering their presence in public spaces. Consequently, they are overrepresented in processes of criminalisation, prosecution and incarceration (Maynard; Khenti). These patterns demonstrate how systemic racism operates through state institutions, restricting mobility,

subjecting these individuals to constant and excessive abuse, and reinforcing social inequality (Wortley).

Therefore, despite the efforts to celebrate and preserve ethnic and racial cultures and the promotion of multiculturalism, the policy functions as a smokescreen that obscures the persistence of structural racism and limits the effectiveness of anti-racist policies (Bannerji 51). This has led to increasing calls for alternative frameworks capable of addressing systemic inequality and redefining social relations. In this context, solidarity emerges as an alternative mode of community formation beyond state-sponsored diversity. The formation of alliances among racialised and marginalised communities is often rooted in shared experiences of precarity and exclusion. As Judith Butler suggests, precariousness is unevenly distributed, yet it can create conditions for relationality and coalition-building across difference (*Notes* 27). These alliances do not necessarily depend on a unified collective identity but can arise from shared struggles against structural oppression.

Although a collective identity might not be an essential prerequisite, the existence of a shared experience of struggle tends to be common ground for encounter with others and the emergence of coalitions. Struggle implies an uneven power dynamic (social, economic and political) which results in the underprivileged group mobilizing against the privileged one and, thus, generating a shared feeling and a sense of loyalty (Oosterlynck et al. 2017). Emotional and affective ties – such as empathy, resistance and mutual support – play a crucial role in the development of solidarity across differences of race, class, gender and other social categories (Wilson). As a result, forms of social activism are "not always about political action that is intentional and linear, but about the unanticipated, messy and complex unfoldings of solidarities that are emotional, embodied and affective, but no less important" (Wilson 65). In this sense, solidarity represents not only a response to systemic inequality but also a potential reconfiguration of social relations beyond the limitations of multiculturalism. The emergence of such solidarities will be further explored in the analysis of the different forms of racism that shape the lives of Edward and Cyril in *Finding Edward*.

3. Reading Racism in the Parallel Lives of Edward Davinia and Cyril Rowntree

As previously established, *Finding Edward* tells the intertwined stories of two protagonists, Cyril and Edward, whose lives unfold in different historical moments yet ultimately converge. Despite the temporal distance between them, their trajectories reveal striking parallels. Both characters are mixed-race and experience forms of abandonment that shape their identities and life paths. At the same time, their experiences diverge significantly, allowing the novel to explore how different historical contexts shape the operation of racism. Edward is born in Toronto in 1922 and is abandoned shortly after birth because of his mixed-race identity: "I can't protect him with his dark skin, and he would ruin me" (Murray 45). His childhood and adolescence are marked by poverty, instability and physical labour. On the other hand, Cyril is born in Jamaica in the 1990s and, thanks to his surrogate grandfather Nelson, has access to education, developing several skills that would supposedly grant him a great future and the possibility of social mobility. After the death of his mother and Nelson, he migrates to Toronto in search of better opportunities, hoping to pursue higher education.

This contrast highlights not only differences in opportunity but also shifts in the discourse surrounding multiculturalism, race and migration. In the early twentieth century, when multiculturalism had not yet emerged as policy, Black individuals were primarily incorporated as labour, although exceptions existed. Edward's father, for instance, migrates to Toronto in 1919 to study law, inspired by the example of Robert Sutherland, the first Black man to graduate from a Canadian university" (Murray 113). Cyril becomes almost a contemporary counterpart of Edward's father, embodying the idea of the 'good migrant': "Like him: smart, educated, with ambition" (66). When Cyril gets to Canada, he manages to get a part-time job and attends university. He presents great academic skills and he even pursues his own project: investigating and writing the story of Edward. However, as the novel demonstrates, this apparent progress does not eliminate racial inequality but rather reconfigures it.

Before the implementation of multiculturalism as a policy, racial discrimination and segregation were overt and normalised. Edward experiences this from infancy: deemed undesirable for adoption due to his mixed-race identity, he is effectively "sold into labour" (49). Deprived of access to education and subjected to harsh living conditions in children's homes and relief camps, his life is defined by precarity (Butler, *Notes*). In

this context, his black skin fell upon him as a gigantic cross that hindered any possibility of a liveable future

Edward's employment opportunities are consistently shaped by the intersection of race and class. Throughout his youth and early adulthood, he is confined to poorly paid, physically demanding jobs. As a consequence of the massive forced migration of Black peoples and other ethno-racial groups, Canada possessed a workforce that could be used for low-paid jobs and who did not hold the basic rights enjoyed by Canadian-born and mainly white workers. During the Great Depression, he loses his job and is sent to a relief camp where men are treated as expendable labour, "clearing them out of Toronto like a plague of rats" (151). This dehumanising treatment reveals how racialised workers were positioned as "disposable" within the economic structure (Butler, *Notes* 11).

Later, Edward moves to Africville and becomes a sleeping car porter in the Canadian Pacific Railway. While this position is perceived within Black communities as relatively stable employment – a life preserver, it also exemplifies racialised labour hierarchies. The job is largely reserved for Black men and requires not only physical endurance but also constant subordination: "that was as much as they'd got out of fighting and dying in the same war, and you could Take It Or Leave It. It is the only job for coloured men that pays a decent dollar" (193). As one senior porter explains, this job requires "fortitude and endurance" (195), since it does not only imply obeying and accepting orders "without question" (193), but it also demands the acknowledgement that "every passenger who rides on this train is your boss. Man, woman, or child . . . If anyone says jump, you jump" (195). This dynamic extends beyond labour relations to encompass racial domination, as workers are subjected to verbal abuse and humiliation:

> You never get used to it . . . I been called 'slave' and 'boy' and 'nigger' so many times . . . But it is unavoidable . . . We sit behind that green curtain, that's a shameful thing to humiliate us, and on the other side you hear what they say about you. As though you're less than a human (195).

These experiences expose how the intersection of race and class results in the subordination of workers of colour, who were considered just like "hound[s]" (197), and the way racism operates through everyday practices, reinforcing the dehumanisation of Black workers.

The segregation and the effects of racism are also present when analysing the Black community's living conditions or even access to housing. Edward's experience in Africville represents a rare moment of belonging and community. Described as "a coloured town" (154) – and the only place where Edward feels at home, Africville provides a space where racial identity is not a source of marginalisation but of shared identity and support. His experience in Africville is completely different from everything he has undergone in life, it is a place where his race does not matter, it is the first time that he can dream about a future, it is the first time he experiences a feeling of belonging and peace; it is almost like a dream: "this God they all seem to love might exist after all. Even if only in Africville" (159). This town is like an oasis in the middle of the desert, it is a place where Black people have established their own community and where subordination, discrimination and racism are not part of the equation.

However, this fragile sense of stability is violently disrupted. In the 1960s, a decade before the implementation of multiculturalism, Africville is demolished, its residents forcibly displaced in an act of racialised urban planning: "They wanted us out, like exterminating roaches" (202). The placement of a dump near the community – resulting in the smoke and stench being constant in the neighbourhood – or the lack of accountability for the deaths caused by poisoned liquor further demonstrate the disregard for Black lives: "no one was ever punished for those killings" (204), they were poor racialized people, their lives were insignificant, non-grievable (Butler, *Precarious Life*). These events reveal how structural racism operates not only through exclusion but through active destruction of Black spaces.

In contrast to Edward's experiences, Cyril encounters forms of racism that are less overt but no less significant. His interactions in Toronto reveal the persistence of racial prejudice within a multicultural framework. When searching for housing, he is subjected to intrusive questioning – he is asked about his story, the reason why he was in Toronto and, more specifically, in that neighbourhood, his future plans, his source of income, etc. – and restrictive conditions. The room he is offered is located in a basement, it smells musty and presents only basic amenities: a bed, a toilet only for himself, a shower and a sink – "luxury bonuses" according to the landlady – a microwave, a kettle and a tiny fridge (36-37). Additionally, strict rules are imposed by the landlady – "no girls, no drugs, no weapons, no parties, no pets, no mess, no late-night noise, no loud music — especially rap" (36) – revealing racialised assumptions about Black identity and behaviour. These

micro-level interactions, shaped through a racist lens, expose how racism continues to shape everyday experiences, even within a discourse of inclusion granted by the implementation of multiculturalism.

Cyril also becomes aware of broader societal attitudes towards migrants and racialised communities. Overhearing conversations about immigration, even inside his household, he encounters narratives that portray migrants as a threat to the nation – putting Canadians "in peril," reinforcing exclusionary notions of belonging: "[t]hey should stay in their own part of the world," "they should be kept out" (66). Such moments highlight the contradictions of a society that promotes multiculturalism while simultaneously reproducing xenophobic and racist discourses that still permeate its society.

Additionally, as it was mentioned in the previous section, since the passing of the Multiculturalism Act, overt racism gave way to more covert racist practices and structural racism continue to be present in Canadian institutions. Structural racism is further evident in the limited economic opportunities available to Cyril. Despite his education and aspirations, he is confined to low-paid, precarious work, such as his job in a convenience store. Though it is not a "great job", Cyril accepts it because it "accommodate[s] his university schedule . . . and he could do his homework there" (33). This reflects broader patterns in which racialised individuals are channelled into specific sectors with limited prospects for advancement. The novel thus illustrates how institutional racism constrains life chances, regardless of individual merit.

The impact of systemic and institutional racism is also evident in the experiences of other characters, such as Paul's cousin, whose involvement in gang activity is framed as a consequence of structural conditions rather than individual failure: the situation for those kids is tragic, since "they kill them if they walk away" (141). As Evan explains, Black youth are subjected to constant surveillance and expectation of failure:

> There are blocks in this town where kids have to fight their way to growing up. You know the discipline from home those moms lay on them? Those expectations? . . . The guys get the discipline on the street, and it's harsh . . . being watched by everyone, cops, teachers, shopkeepers, neighbours, pastor included — and did I say cops — since you're four years old, with all of them waiting for you to make your first mistake. Frightened for you, but also bracing for it. (167)

Evan's discourse perfectly illustrates how racism operates as a self-perpetuating system that shapes life trajectories. Nevertheless, this demonstrates that it is not a question of race, but a question of racism; as Evan states in the novel, those Black kids are "pushed into it" (167). In Canada, racism continues to exist under the multicultural label and govern the lives of those racialized minorities, sentencing them to a life of precarity in most cases.

Police violence represents one of the most explicit forms of racism depicted in the novel. Cyril himself becomes a victim of racial profiling and brutality. Despite being warned by family and friends about the dangers of "Running While Black" because his skin is "a target" (91–92), Cyril decided to continue enjoying his strolls around the neighbourhood; however, during one of his walks, he is stopped, assaulted and wrongfully detained. When he saw a police car; Cyril "felt for the ID in his pocket then pulled his hand quickly free and stood still, facing the car with his arms extended and his open palms facing front" (101). After patting him down and asking him several questions, the two police officers joked about the Jamaicans killing people in Canada. Cyril could not control himself and spitted: "You fucking racist assholes" (101). The police officers insulted and humiliated him, they handcuffed him and started to punch him in his ribs, then the kicking came and Cyril fell to the ground. Once he was laying and handcuffed one of the police officers smashed his chest; Cyril started to beg: "Don't break my bones". When the beating stopped, they assured him that they had done it for his own good, that he was acting up; and they took him to the police station. When they let him go, they just said that they had mistaken him "for another Black guy" (104).

This incident exemplifies how Black bodies are constructed as inherently suspicious and subject to state violence. As Maynard argues, the assumption of a relationship between criminality and Blackness has granted authority to the police to carry out "quasi-legal (or illegal) identity checks, searches, seizures and car stops, at a rate unimaginable to most non-racialized Canadians" (124). Racial profiling has been key in creating criminals and sentencing them, since "each new arrest contains the risk of a new charge, resulting in a worsening of the criminal record (if the charge is proved) and the probability of a longer sentence and more restrictive conditions than the previous time" (Bernard and McAll, qtd. in Maynard 87). These practices are central to the functioning of systemic racism, enabling disproportionate surveillance, arrest and incarceration of Black individuals.

As Cyril becomes increasingly aware of these dynamics, his perspective shifts. Initially sceptical about the extent of racism in Canada, he gradually recognises both its overt and covert manifestations. His exposure to activism further shapes his understanding of racism as a structural issue rather than a series of isolated incidents. In the novel, there are several instances in which the murders of Black men are mentioned and protests related to the 'Black Lives Matter' movement are discussed (89, 92-93, 215-217). As stated by George Dei, the 'Black Lives Matter' movement does not only serve as a protest against Black killings, but it also constitutes a reminder that harm and subjugation is disproportionately distributed among populations along the lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, mental health and (dis)ability (*[Re]framing blackness* 39). In this sense, Cyril's trajectory reflects a process of political awakening that parallels his investigation into Edward's life.

Ultimately, the comparison between Edward and Cyril reveals both continuity and transformation in the operation of racism. While Edward's experiences are characterised by overt forms of exclusion and segregation, Cyril's reflect more subtle but equally pervasive forms of structural and institutional racism. In both cases, race functions as a determining factor that constrains their lives and shapes their opportunities. At the same time, these experiences also prompt engagement with forms of resistance, highlighting the emergence of Black anti-racist consciousness and the potential for solidarity across different historical contexts.

4. Solidarity and Resistance: Forging Alliances Against Anti-Blackness

The instances of racism experienced by the protagonists of the novel are complemented by the creation of alliances and relationship of solidarity, which function as key forms of resistance. These practices operate at different levels, and most of the times are part of anti-racist strategies. On the one hand, there are policies and programmes aim at disrupting white supremacy and challenging systemic inequality; on the other, more informal and grassroots forms of anti-racist action contest dominant racialised narratives in everyday contexts. For such resistance to be effective, it must adopt an inclusive and intersectional framework that recognises how racism intersects and interacts with gender, class, sexuality, and other axes of oppression (Fleras xiii).

Race remains a central category in the creation and development of both individual and collective identities. While it operates as a potent mechanism of social exclusion, it can also become a powerful basis for organising resistance and establishing alliances among visible and marginalised groups (Goldberg and Solomos). In Sheila Murray's novel, both Edward and Cyril engage in different forms of resistance, reflecting the historical evolution of anti-racist struggle. In Edward's case, resistance is closely tied to collective organisation and labour activism. His participation in the railway union provides not only the possibility of improved working conditions but also a sense of dignity and belonging. The union embodies the hope for justice and structural change: "But it's going to get better because we've got a union and we're fighting for change . . . I'm working with the fellas that are doing that . . . Change is going to happen. Then they'll have to treat us right" (196). Similarly, his involvement in the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) connects him to broader movements of Black empowerment, racial pride, citizen rights and economic self-sufficiency.

In the novel, public demonstrations also constitute crucial spaces of resistance. Edward's participation in labour and antifascist marches highlights the importance of collective presence in public space, such as the one taking place in Spadina Avenue in 1933 (109) or the one from 1938 organized by the labour unions:

> He marched with men from the labour unions . . . when he still believed they could save themselves. He slept outside with a hundred men all huddled together for warmth. . . . But the march down Spadina Avenue that next morning, their faces bathed by a wind that was warm despite the cold night, was grand. . . . They marched behind a banner that stretched the width of the road. It took ten men to hold it. The words waved in the air, letters big enough for everyone to read: WE ARE CITIZENS NOT TRANSIENTS. (151-152)

The slogan "WE ARE CITIZENS NOT TRANSIENTS" (151–152) is particularly significant, as it directly challenges the perception of Black individuals as temporary, disposable or non-belonging subjects. By asserting citizenship, the protesters claim recognition, rights and permanence within the nation, thereby contesting exclusionary definitions of national identity.

These collective acts transform individual experiences of marginalisation into political demands, fostering solidarity through shared struggle. They act as places of encounter where personal experiences of discrimination may transform into public claims for justice and recognition, they open up a dialogue between communities and groups to

form coalitions (Wilson). As argued by Routledge, shared spaces, bodily movements and emotional engagement create *sensuous solidarities* (Routledge) – originated by a shared feeling, whether anger, sadness, rage, aversion, honour or pride. In this regard, Judith Butler's (*Vulnerability in Resistance*) theorisation of vulnerability and resistance is especially relevant. As Butler argues, vulnerability does not simply denote passivity but can become the basis for collective resistance, as bodies exposed to precarity assemble and assert their right to appear within the political sphere (*Vulnerability in Resistance* 15). In this sense, shared exposure to violence and marginalisation – this is, shared precarity – becomes not only a condition of vulnerability but also a potential basis for solidarity, generating forms of relationality that underpin coalition-building. These manifestations of solidarity are not only driven by the demands derived from social activism, but also by bonds of friendship.

Alongside these more visible forms of resistance, the novel also presents community-building as a crucial site of solidarity. An example of this is Africville, presented as a space where Black individuals create networks of mutual support and belonging, for Edward it is the first environment in which he experiences stability, care and the possibility of a future: "he's probably turned up in the right place" (155). The community functions as a form of resistance in itself: a place for solidarities, a place where the emotional ties, shared spaces, friendship and affective attachments develop alliances and coalitions – enabling the development of social bonds that counteract the exclusion imposed by the wider society.

In Cyril's case, the element of friendship and affective bonds is crucial in order to sustain the motivation for solidarity, social activism as well as the participation in acts of resistance. His involvement in anti-racist initiatives is closely linked to his relationships with other Black youth, whose political awareness shapes his own. One significant example is the celebration of Black History Month, which is presented not merely as commemoration but as a form of counter-narrative: "this month is about changing up the story for four weeks till the old tale comes round again and is told with disappointing regularity for the rest of the year" (58). This reconfiguration of history is further developed through the theatrical performance organised by Cyril and his peers, in which traditional colonial roles are inverted, Black kids would play the role of colonials and white kids would be the colonized (127). This performative reversal can be read through a decolonial lens, as it challenges dominant epistemologies and exposes the constructed

nature of colonial power relations. Additionally, the performance is carried out in the public roadway without a permit in order to "get political support" (242). Because, as stated by one of Cyril's friends, "nothing changes without confrontation. Racism kills. Don't forget that" (243). By disrupting established narratives and norms, such acts create space for alternative ways of knowing and being, aligning with decolonial approaches that seek to unsettle hegemonic structures.

The use of literature as a form of resistance is also crucial. Cyril's decision to write a book about Edward's story constitutes an act of historical recovery that challenges the erasure of Black experiences in Canada. This act of re-writing history also constitutes an opportunity for empowerment since it emphasizes a community's own voice – commonly silenced – and preserves memory (146).

In the novel, university spaces further illustrate the role of solidarity in contemporary resistance; there, student organisations such as the Black Students Association or the group United Black Students provide platforms for collective action – enabling students to mobilise around issues affecting their communities. Acts such as petitions demanding justice for victims of racial violence (93) or protests following the acquittal of police officers involved in the killing of a Black man (93) demonstrate how solidarity is enacted through organised resistance. Moreover, Cyril also experiences other acts of resistance that are more explicit and overt, like the protest against Black killings at City Hall (215-216), which illustrate the potential for cross-movement alliances. The presence of diverse organisations – like Black Action Defence Committee, OCAP, anarchists, communists, animal rights, some Greenpeace people and the New Democratic Party, "the usual sussspectsss" (215) – highlights the intersectional nature of contemporary resistance. When bodies come together in public spaces, they are also claiming their right to appear, as stated by Judith Butler:

> . . . when bodies assemble . . . they are exercising a plural and performative right to appear, one that asserts and instates the body in the midst of the political field, and which, in its expressive and signifying function, delivers a bodily demand for a more livable set of economic, social, and political conditions no longer afflicted by induced forms of precarity. (*Notes* 11)

Nevertheless, the policing of the protest underscores Butler's (*Notes*) argument that not all bodies are equally permitted to appear in public space. Two protestors are "dressed as parodies of police officers" (215) and they perform the murder of a Black man within the

protest, which causes the reaction of real police officers. Cyril and other friends are arrested after confronting the police: “We are here with a permit to demonstrate” (219). This evidences how the right to assemble is unevenly distributed along racial lines.

Narratives of resistance and solidarity have been central in challenging anti-Blackness, which is sustained through cultural values, prejudices and discriminatory behaviours, institutional and structural practices (Dei, *On Race*). While significant progress has been made, particularly in terms of social awareness and political consciousness, racism continues to shape Canadian society. This is perfectly seen when examining the political stance of Cyril’s Black friends, who are conscious of the oppression suffered by their community and the need to combat it. The comparison between Edward and Cyril demonstrates that, despite historical changes and the implementation of multiculturalism, many forms of resistance remain consistent, including protest, civil disobedience and alliance-building.

Importantly, multiculturalism was not originally conceived as an anti-racist framework but rather as a model for managing diversity. As such, its limitations in addressing systemic racism are not incidental but structural. This reinforces the need for continued anti-racist strategies that directly confront patterns of racism, institutional power, privilege, and social oppression and inequality (see Dei, *On Race*; Bonnett; Calliste and Dei). Nevertheless, for those grassroots strategies to succeed, it is essential to address the multiple forms of racism that coexist, including interpersonal, cultural, institutional and systemic manifestations. Rather than treating racism as a singular phenomenon, an intersectional and context-sensitive approach is required in order to dismantle its different expressions and to sustain meaningful forms of resistance.

5. Conclusion

The focal points of this article have been the persistence of different forms of racism in contemporary Canada, alongside the emergence of solidarity and alliance-building as key forms of resistance to anti-Blackness. Drawing on Sunera Thobani’s critique of multiculturalism as a system that heightens the command of whiteness, this article has offered an analysis of one of the main flaws of this system: its inability to effectively address systemic racism and guarantee full equity, inclusion and social justice for racialised communities.

Through the comparative analysis of *Finding Edward*'s protagonists, this article has demonstrated how racism continues to shape Black lives across different historical periods, perpetuating economic, social and political subjugation, and condemning Black citizens in Toronto to a life of precarity. While Edward's experiences are marked by explicit forms of segregation and exclusion, Cyril's reflect more covert, yet equally pervasive, manifestations of structural and institutional racism. This continuity reveals that, despite the implementation of multicultural policies and the visibility of anti-racist activism, racial inequality remains deeply embedded in Canadian society. Importantly, this article does not argue that multiculturalism has failed in relation to anti-racism in absolute terms, but rather that it functions as a model for managing diversity, which can obscure systemic inequalities and limit the scope of transformative change. In this sense, the persistence of racism in areas such as housing, employment, education and policing reflects the structural constraints of the multicultural model rather than a simple policy failure. At the same time, the novel foregrounds the role of resistance and solidarity as crucial responses to these conditions. Both Edward and Cyril engage, in different ways, with forms of collective action that emerge from shared experiences of marginalisation. These practices demonstrate how racism not only produces exclusion but can also generate conditions for alliance-building, solidarity and political mobilisation.

The analysis has also shown that race continues to function as a central axis in the development of an individual and collective identity. An analysis of different blatant and subtle instances of racism has served to signal that, despite the institutional attempts to foster a multicultural nation-state characterised by equity and inclusion, race and ethnicity continue to be a mechanism through which individuals are marginalised and subjected to systemic inequality. Simultaneously, the activism of recent years and the creation of alliances against anti-Blackness illustrate the possibility for race to become the main motive among diverse visible minorities to establish a basis for solidarity and organize resistance. In this regard, the emergence of alliances – whether through labour movements, community-building, cultural production or activism – points to the potential for alternative modes of social organisation. According to George Dei, "resistance and resurgence must be conceived broadly as encompassing . . . cultural memories, histories, actions, and spirits to foster collective solidarities" (*[Re] framing blackness* 17). Furthermore, the novel suggests that shared experiences of precarity can foster relational forms of resistance that do not rely on fixed or homogeneous identities. Instead,

solidarities emerge through lived experiences of vulnerability, exclusion and struggle, enabling connections across different social positions. These dynamics reinforce the importance of understanding resistance as both structural and affective, encompassing not only organised political action but also everyday practices of care and community formation.

Ultimately, *Finding Edward* offers a critical lens through which to examine both the limitations of multiculturalism and the possibilities of solidarity as a framework to challenge dominant narratives and create space for more just and inclusive social relations. In doing so, it underscores the need for sustained anti-racist strategies that move beyond the management of diversity and towards the transformation of the structures that sustain inequality.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

SILVIA PÉREZ-CASTELO is PhD candidate in Gender and Diversity at the University of Oviedo, where she is a Severo Ochoa Predoctoral Research Fellow. Her research focuses on contemporary Canadian literature, particularly on critiques of multiculturalism and the exploration of alternative frameworks grounded in solidarity, care, and relationality. Her doctoral project examines works by Canadian women writers set in Toronto, analysing how they reimagine community, belonging, and cultural diversity beyond institutional discourses. She has published in *Miscelánea: A Journal of English and American Studies* and has forthcoming work in *Canada Watch* (York University). She has presented her research at several national and international conferences.
Contact: perezcsilvia@uniovi.es.
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0002-6657-4173.

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