

CALL FOR PAPERS:

**Special issue of *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*, Spring 2025
On the Work of Rinaldo Walcott**

Edited by Ronald Cummings (McMaster University) and Nalini Mohabir (Concordia University)

This special issue of TOPIA invites essays and reflections on the work of Rinaldo Walcott. Since the 1990s, Walcott has been a major voice in contemporary critical theory. His interventions however have never been confined to academic writing. He has been a public scholar and vocal commentator on a range of topics, including Black and Queer life; the neoliberal university; the social and cultural landscape of Toronto; the politics of diaspora; Canadian politics and policies; Black-Indigenous relations; the problem of nation; border violence, and the list continues. He is currently the Carl V. Granger Chair in Africana and American Studies at the University at Buffalo, where he continues to mentor new generations of critical scholars. His output over the past decades has been prolific. However, at the heart of his concerns remains the centrality of Black life for understanding contemporary world making. He is the author of over a hundred publications, we highlight some of his books below.

His first volume of essays *Black Like Who* (1997) began with a direct and clear articulation of a project of writing blackness “out of bounds.” This idea has taken on different valances and directions across his work. In the introduction to *Black Like Who* Walcott writes that “blackness as a sign...carries particular histories of resistance and domination. But blackness is also a sign which is never closed and always under contestation...various kinds of blackness are always in progress, always in the process of becoming...” (xiv). Among other things, *Black Like Who* offered an exploration of the limits and “the Problem of Nation” (71) and mapped a turn to the possibilities of diaspora as a “temporality and spatiality of meaning” (102) that might help us attend to `movements, cultural complexities and multiplicities. At the same time, it is also important to read his work as intervening from Canada interrogating the spatiality of forgetting that often accompanies national narratives. He notes for example how the Black Atlantic often neglects Canada as a site of black diasporic life, while Canadian narratives obscure and disavow a long history and presence of Black life.

We might read the edited volume *Rude: Contemporary Black Canadian Cultural Criticism* (2000) as a counterpoint to *Black Like Who*. Both volumes assemble a range of cultural texts including film and visual arts, literature, sports, music, towards an understanding of culture as a site of political and social contestation and remaking and through which we might grapple with the dynamism of Black Canadian expressive culture beyond the binaries of being “celebratory

or dismissive” (10). In this regard, the volume inhabits some of the critical promises of the cultural studies turn of the 1990s. *Rude* notably takes its title from Clement Virgo’s 1995 film. Here the notion of being “out of bounds” takes on additional valences and desires linked to the politics of insubordination and sexuality.

Walcott’s *Queer Returns* (2016) “returns to familiar themes” (7) engaging questions of “diaspora, multiculturalism, sexuality, nation and citizenship” through a series of essays written in the wake of 9/11, in the shadow of the fall of the twin towers and “the violence unleashed post-9/11 globally” (10). In framing these discussions, Walcott reminds us that “what it means to be human is ultimately at stake” (10). In *Queer Returns* Walcott not only marks the limits of nation, along lines seen in his previous work like *Black Like Who*, but also explores the limits of liberal Western conceptions of the human. Walcott notes that “Black people are often so firmly ejected from the current, partial definitions of what it means to be human” (10). However, his examination does not turn towards the rubric of inclusion. Instead, he focuses on the possibilities of the otherwise. For Walcott, “when Black people are centered, other modes of being emerge” (10). We might read *Black Life: Post BLM and the Struggle for Freedom* (2019), coauthored with Idil Abdillahi, as one indexing of the tensions between “versions of European coloniality/modernity” (25) and their “current global arrangements” (94), including those which shape governmentality in Canada and the “claims we might make on behalf of other forms of knowing and living” (25). The work also centres BLM as one instance of a broader “ethical imperative to produce a different world now” (25), an imperative which is registered in the book’s title as “the struggle for freedom.” According to Walcott and Abdillahi, “the kind of political logic we are calling for requires a different understanding of the world and a new imagination that exceeds this world, as we presently know it, experience it and live it” (95).

In his most recent volumes Walcott’s examination of blackness “out of bounds” has centered on the problem of freedom interlinked with questions of abolition and emancipation. In *The Long Emancipation* (2021), Walcott notes that “The problem of emancipation is central to the conditions of Black life” (105). He examines freedom as “yet to come”(1). The experience of living in the long emancipation then is “the continuation of juridical and legislative status of Black nonbeing” (3). Walcott maps the persistence of Plantation logics in *On Property* (2021) demonstrating for instance that “property is a problem” – in the continuing past/ present – a pretext for policing Black people. His call here is similarly for a new order of things: “Abolition is not just about ending current systems; it is also an engaged and creative approach to social organization meant to fully transform how we live together.”

Throughout these volumes Walcott reminds us that “Writing blackness is difficult work” but it is the work that allows us to imagine another kind of world. He closes his recent essay “Towards another shape of the world” with the reminder that “Invention, then, is our inheritance

too...The new shape of the world is the end of this one” (131). This call to imagine endings (of anti-Blackness, heteropatriarchy, coloniality, racial capitalism, dehumanization) and to seed new beginnings (of freedom, expression, knowledge) is also reflected in Walcott’s efforts outside of the academy. His writing aimed at a general audience offer incisive critiques of power including the quandaries of “solidarity;” his media interventions critically dissect structures of whiteness; and his engagements, actions, and activism in the public sphere (including Twitter) reflect his intellectual project, a repeated call for that “leap that might introduce ‘invention into existence’ ” (The Black Aquatic, 2021).

TOPIA invites submissions of academic articles, reflective pieces, and review essays for a special issue on Rinaldo Walcott’s substantial and wide-ranging scholarship. Themes and topics include (but are not limited to):

- Black Canadian Studies,
- Black Queer diasporas,
- Black Queer masculinities,
- Black aesthetics and performance
- Black Studies and Caribbean Studies
- Black intellectual genealogies
- The Black Atlantic Revisited
- Water
- Black Ontologies
- Rinaldo Walcott and the essay form
- Rinaldo Walcott and Cultural studies
- Rinaldo Walcott and Pedagogies of Resistance
- Critiques of the neoliberal university
- Critiques of institutionalized EDI strategies
- Abolition
- Black feminist thought and politics
- Toronto as diasporic city
- Rinaldo Walcott, Food, Hospitality and Decolonial Eating
- Sovereignty, Freedom, Emancipation
- Plantation and Property
- Praxis of the new humanism
- Black cultural studies today
- Public scholarship and editorial interventions

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The deadline for submission of full papers is **September 1, 2024**. The special issue is scheduled for Spring 2025, *Topia* Volume 50. Submissions should be made through Topia's author submission portal, ScholarOne: <https://mc04.manuscriptcentral.com/topia>. Manuscripts must follow the journal's style guide, available here: <https://utpjournals.press/journals/topia/submissions>

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