

Ghostly Memories of Afro-Europeanness after the Great War in Esi Edugyan's *Half Blood Blues*

Memòries fanstasmals de l'afroeupeïtat després de la Gran Guerra en *Half Blood Blues* de Esi Edugyan

Vicent Cucarella Ramon

Universitat de València. Vicent.Cucarella@uv.es

Received: 11.07.2019. Accepted: 25.07.2019

Abstract: African Canadian author Esi Edugyan's second novel *Half Blood Blues*, published in 2011, undertakes an excavation of the trajectories of different types of blackness across the convoluted history of Europe after the Great War and the Nazi regime by focusing on the tragic whereabouts of Afro-European denizen Hiero Falk and his jazz band. The story exemplifies the complex perception of the black subject's European identity and its resilient attitude by unpacking their ghostly memories and the exclusionary racial policies in a continent caught up into different wars. Thus, using as a theoretical framework the politics of cultural memory alongside the aesthetics of the (postcolonial) gothic and its intersection with the workings of racialization this essay focuses on Edugyan's retrieval of Afro-European memory haunted by a context of racial supremacy and erasure to outline the much needed dialogue between European history and its colonial endeavor.

Keywords: Afro-Europeanness; racialization; hauntology; memory; exclusion

Resum: La segona novel·la de l'escriptora afrocanadenca Esi Edugyan, *Half Blood Blues*, publicada el 2011, mena en l'estudi de les trajectòries de diferents representacions de negritud a través de l'avalotada història d'Europa després de la Gran Guerra i del règim Nazi posant el focus en la tràgica existència del ciutadà afroeuropèu Hiero Falk i la seua banda de jazz. La història exemplifica la complexa percepció del subjecte negre a Europa i la seua actitud resilient mitjançant les memòries fantasmals lligades a les polítiques d'exclusió racial d'un continent entrampat en diferents guerres. Així, utilitzant com a marc teòric les polítiques de la memòria cultural amb l'estètica del gòtic postcolonial i la seua sincrasi amb els procediments de racialització, aquest article se centra en la remença de la memòria afroeuropa posseïda per un context de supremacisme racial i anihilament per tal de reclamar diàleg entre història europea i colonialisme.

Paraules clau: Afroeupeïtat; racialització; posseïment; memòria; exclusió

» Cucarella Ramon, Vicent. 2019. "Ghostly Memories of Afro-Europeanness after the Great War in Esi Edugyan's *Half Blood Blues*". *Quaderns de Filologia: Estudis Literaris* XXIV: 55-75. doi: 10.7203/qdfed.24.16330

The belief in ghosts so prevalent in old countries must have had its foundation in the consciousness of guilt.

-Susanna Moodie, *Roughing It in the Bush*

1. Introduction*

In his discerning article “The Generation of Memory: Reflections on the ‘Memory Boom’ in Contemporary Historical Studies” Jay Winter explains the pervasive influence and obsession with memory since it layers out “a multiplicity of social, cultural, medical, and economic trends and developments of an eclectic but intersecting nature” (2001: 364). The term ‘Memory Boom’ was coined by Andreas Huyssen to point out the permanent concern with the many ways in which the past still continues to infuse the present. Accordingly, “the emergence of memory as a key concern in Western societies, a turning toward the past that stands in stark contrast to the privileging of the future so characteristic of twentieth century modernity” (Huyssen, 2000: 21) has become a recent cultural asset and a critical tool not only in the fields of sociological and cultural studies but also in the realm of literary criticism. This is so because “the concept of cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose ‘cultivation’ serves to establish and convey that society’s self-image” (Assman, 1995: 132). This move towards the recognition and study of the past to grapple with the maladies of the present for a better understanding of the future is clearly seen in the production of historical fiction in the literary market. Eleanor Ty and Cynthia Sugars (2014: 2) acknowledge this trend and explain that “(t)he surge in the popularity of the genre of historical fiction in recent decades is one part of this trend toward the historical commemoration and (post)colonial nostalgia”. The noted critic Peter Hodgins (2004: 100) also relates memory and the cultural momentum of postcolonial literary studies linked by what he calls a “nostalgia for memory”. Put shortly, in the wake of postcolonial literature and a postmodern era, the concern with

* The research leading to the publication of this essay was funded by Generalitat Valenciana-Conselleria d’Innovació, Universitats i Ciència (Project ‘Literatures (Trans) Ètniques Nord-americanes en un Context Global’, GV/2019/114).

memory has been retrieved and appears fully alive in literature and literary criticism. From seminal works on the subject such as Foucault's conceptualization of 'counter-memory' in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (1977), Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), David Lowenthal's *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (1985), Lois Parkinson Zamora's *The Usable Past: The Imagination of History in Recent Fiction of the Americas* (1977) to the more recent contributions such as Cynthia Sugars and Eleanor Ty's *Canadian Literature and Cultural Memory* and María Jesús Martínez-Alfaro and Silvia Pellicer-Ollín's *Memory Frictions in Contemporary Literature*, the field of memory studies and literature is yet utterly fertile.

In light of this trend, this article attempts to read African Canadian author Esi Edugyan's second novel *Half Blood Blues*, published in 2011, within the practice of memory work. Awarded with the prestigious Scotiabank Giller Prize (though it also received shortlist honours for both the 2011 Man Booker Prize and the 2012 Orange Prize for Fiction) the novel is inspired on Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi's memoir *Destined to Witness: Growing Up Black in Nazi Germany* (1999) and offers a fecund ground to expose the tragic memories of exclusion and death of black diasporic subjectivities under the tyrannical regime of the Third Reich up to WWII and beyond. In the novel, a group of two African American jazz musicians, Sid and Chip, and an Afro-German comrade Hieronymus ("Hiero") Falk unfold a geography of race altered by the fascist rise to power and, eventually, by the Second World War to muse about the excruciating racialization on non-Aryans. The manifold story, chronicled by Sid, is set primarily in Paris and Berlin, back and forth from the onset of the war to Berlin in 1992, where he and Chip attend the premiere of a documentary about their former friend Hiero, who has become a jazz legend. Hiero's memory hovers like a specter over the novel haunting Sid, who harbours an infamous betrayal that led to Hiero's death since it favored his arrest by the Nazis and, eventually, became lost to History. Or so it is believed. The mystery revolving around the possibility of Hiero being alive traces the amalgamating path that fuses memory with a gothic narrative.

The novel undertakes an excavation of the trajectories of different types of blackness across the convoluted history of Europe after the Great War and the Nazi regime and makes a literary intervention to flesh out Clarence Lusane's statement (2005: 3) in his pivotal work *Hitler's*

Black Victims: “The Black presence is mystified, shrouded in whispers and innuendoes, dismissed as inconsequential, and lost in the popular and scholarly notions of an all-white Europe and in a reading of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust in which blackness is excluded”. In this light, by interplaying with the trope of the ghost and the specter of the deadly presence, Edugyan blends the work of memory with the postcolonial gothic. I invoke here the postcolonial gothic following Canadian scholars Cynthia Sugars and Gerry Turcotte’s turn to Canadian, postcolonial gothic literature that rethinks the supposed sense that “Canada was too ‘new’ to be sufficiently haunted” (Sugars and Turcotte, 2009: xiii). As an African Canadian writer, Edugyan manipulates the postcolonial gothic to apply it to, also, postcolonial subjects –as the ones that peopled his second novel– in order to evince a type of gothic sense that is strongly “located in a realm of unknown dangers and [which] negotiates both internal and external disquiet” (Sugars and Turcotte, 2009: xv). In this postcolonial gothic rendering, the haunting world gains currency enclosed in the suspense junction between the self and the nation.

In this light, the novel proposes an interesting story to ponder about what Jacques Derrida stated in *Specters of Marx*, that “haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony” (1994: 37). By mixing gothic motifs and memory work the novel steps into a “legacy which appears in the form of unresolved memory traces and occluded histories resulting from the experience of colonial oppression, diasporic migration, or national consolidation” readily figured in the shape of “ghosts...that ‘haunt’ the nation/subject from without and within” (Sugars and Turcotte, 2009: vii). *Half Blood Blues* contributes and adds up to the postcolonial turn –stemming from the 1990s– that evolves from “liberatory politics and counter-culture” to “the growing emergence of what would become the more profound attention to acts of memorialization and recuperation” (Sugars and Ty, 2014: 8), especially so in a context of inflamed nationalism.

Hence, I believe that the novel is firmly grounded on the working of these two literary approaches because the postcolonial gothic is unrelentingly intertwined with memory and remembering as Helen Tiffin (1996: 158) clearly notes: “the term postcolonial...implies the *persistence* of colonial legacies and post-independent cultures, not their disappearance or erasure”. This persistence of the black ghost –or the ‘Africanist presence’, as Toni Morrison would put it– triggers the nov-

el's fight for the recovery of the crippled stories and histories of black peoples in Inter-war Europe.

Hiero's band, the Hot-Time Swingers, play out a multiracial group through the story. Besides the African American musicians Chip Jones and the aforementioned narrator Sid Griffiths, the band is also formed by three Germans: one is a Jew, Paul Butterstein, and two are white, Big Fritz Bayer and Ernst von Haselberg. With the insertion of African Canadian musician and agent Delilah Brown, whose fate is also connected to the group, the story allows to be read as the tormented representation of black presence and memory in/across Europe.

Consequently, in this paper I read *Half Blood Blues* using as a theoretical framework the politics of cultural memory alongside the aesthetics of the (postcolonial) gothic and its intersection with the workings of racialization that expand the historical legacy of what Paul Gilroy coined the Black Atlantic focusing on the impact of blackness in a European context of racial supremacy. In so doing, I aim to showcase that the novel exemplifies the complex perception of the black subject's European identity and its resilient attitude by unpacking their ghostly memories and the exclusionary racial policies in a continent caught up into different wars.

2. *Half Blood Blues*: Ghostly Memories, Exclusion and Racialization in Inter-War Europe

Half Blood Blues's awarded success follows a literary movement that started in the first half of the twentieth century and has been followed ever since. The presence of black people in Europe and their literary imprint has been a source of study that is constantly evoked and which continues to be a tendency currently cultivated by black authors¹. In an interview after the publication of the novel, Edugyan admitted the aim of her story from its inception:

¹ From Richard Wright to Christopher Isherwood's *Berlin Stories* (1946) the presence of black North Americans has carved a niche in the canon of North American literature. Edugyan's *Half Blood Blues* needs to be read within this trend that is constantly growing with the publication of recent novels by black North American writers that also chronicle the presence of blackness in Europe such as Bernice L. MacFadden's *The Book of Harlan* (2016) or Darryl Pinckney's *Black Deutschland* (2017).

Between the publication of my first novel and this one, I lived in, and traveled widely throughout, Europe. Most of my time was spent in Germany – first a year in the south, in Stuttgart, and, later on, two months in a little northern town. As a black woman living in what is, admittedly, a homogenous society (compared to Canada), I began to wonder about the experience of black people who had lived in Germany in the past, specifically during the Third Reich (2011b: n. p.).

Truthfully, her first novel, *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne* (2004), throws into relief a complex and rich interpellation to the formation of black diasporic subjectivity within the Canadian nation-state. This debut novel unfolds a sounder tapestry of blackness linking the uprootedness of the African past to the tumultuous accommodation of black subjectivity in a country that boasts about its welcoming ethos². For her second novel, Edugyan shifted the so-called ‘black geographies’ – as coined by Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods to refer to trajectories defined by “a history of brutal segregation and erasure” (2007: 4)– to shed light to the different directions and lost memories of black people in Europe intending to demystify silent histories. As she confesses in the same interview:

One of the fascinating things that emerged from my research was how differently people of the same race could be treated under the Third Reich. In the case of blacks, for example, African diplomats were left mostly unmolested, as were certain other foreigners. Afro-Germans seemed to receive the worst treatment: A plan was actually put in place to sterilize some of the children. And then, of course, there was the treatment of the Jews. I wanted to show the complexity of all these realities. It’s a novel, of course, and not a work of non-fiction, and so whatever the reader is left with should, I hope, arise out of the material, out of empathy with the characters, rather than from some political position (Edugyan, 2011b: n. p.).

Therefore, from the very beginning the novel brings to the fore the complex intimacies that imbricate the politics of visibility and invisibility. To this end, Edugyan employs the literary gothic trope of the (black) ghostly presence in search for recognition since, as Gordon contends

² I have discussed this topic elsewhere. See Cucarella-Ramon (2015) for the tackling of these issues in Edugyan’s debut novel.

in his propitious work *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*,

[t]o write stories concerning exclusions and invisibilities is to write ghost stories. To write ghost stories implies that ghosts are real, that is to say, that they produce material effects. To impute a kind of objectivity to ghosts implies that, from certain standpoints, the dialectics of visibility and invisibility involve a constant renegotiation between what can be seen and what is in the shadows (Gordon, 2008: 17).

These ‘shadows’ speak for the real interest that lurks behind the story’s core. The novel’s narrative form mimics the fragmented memory of its characters and is presented in a non-linear plot that welcomes the problematic use of memory that Sid, as the narrator, incorporates to the different accounts portrayed. One of the most interesting things about the problematization of the memory in the novel is how Sid manipulates its usage to tell –and preclude– the real events and tragedies that accompany Hiero’s life. It is apt to say, then, that the novel has two different protagonists – on that speaks and one that is spoken about. The book opens with Sid’s description of the arrest of Afro-German jazz trumpeter Hiero Falk by the Nazis –“Paris 1940”– and closes by providing some of the pending answers as to his later straining contingencies –“Poland 1992”. In between those two historical moments, the narrative seesaws from the repressed memories of those hard times revisited in two sturdy central sections –“Berlin 1939” and “Paris 1939”– to two shorter contemporary frames both set in “Berlin 1992” that register Hiero’s friends’ troubled feelings over their recovery and helps to recompose the real facts and stories of these group of black people in a troublesome momentum for Europe.

The round up the story, the missing points in the chapter that inaugurates the novel will be filled as the narration unfolds through a recreation of the events thanks to the restorative use of memory and the suspense of the postcolonial gothic that help to demystify the conflicting nature of this group of people traumatized for his friend’s loss.

In the first section of the book –“Paris 1940”– we learn the way in which the SS –the Boots as they are called– discover Hiero and Sid after the former leaves the hideout that shelters them after they all fled from Germany trying to evade the Nazi persecution based on racial

terms. Hiero's desire to get milk for breakfast³ prompts his discovery in the streets of the French capital after the accusation of being "Foreign" and a "(s)tateless person of Negro descent" (Edugyan, 2011: 16-17). Sid witnesses this tragic moment that not only makes Hiero disappear but also triggers the constant mixing of flashbacks and present moments in a capricious use of memory, or probably is best to use Toni Morrison's re-memory. In her masterpiece *Beloved*, Morrison coined the term re-memory to reclaim a new type of memory deeply ingrained in the African American consciousness that can fit Sethe's tormented self through the process of acceptance, healing and understanding. What is held in the memory, in Morrison's literary revision, can be tempered with in order to survive. Sid capitalizes on the usage of re-memory to hide away the real facts that led to Hiero's detention and ultimate disappearance. In a literary move à la Holden Caulfield, Sid narrates: "I stood there. Stood there with my hands hanging like strange weights against my thighs, my chest full of something like water. Stood there watching Hiero go" (Edugyan, 2011a: 17-18). This recount of the facts that is told following literary motifs akin to slave narratives will be demonstrated as untrue or incomplete when Hiero's ghost haunts Sid's conscience giving room for the reality to surface because "(h)aunting raises specters" but it also "alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future (Gordon, 2008: xvi). From this moment onwards, Sip's narration throughout the novel will be haunted by Hiero's disappearance and his (literary) representation will become the ghostly memory that abides the story. In this sense, the novel participates in the unapologetic link between memory and historicity by means of Derrida's notion of *hauntology* that temporarily replaces 'ontology' to lean towards the return of repressed knowledge and stories "that constantly suspend ontological certainties" (Derrida, 1994: 10). In accordance, and building upon this, memory is also

³ I cannot help thinking about the imagery that milk conveys for enslaved black people in North America premised on a typological reading of the Bible, which refers to the US as 'the land of milk and honey'. Thus, in the literary world of black authors, milk has come to signify the impossibility to achieve whiteness, and the slippery trait that relates to the fluidity of the beverage stands for the unstable ground on which black subjectivity has historically walked. The fact that Hiero gets caught—and his desire to escape gets eventually thwarted—whilst trying to purchase milk serves as a powerful evocation.

attached to race and racialization processes in this turbulent epoch that *Half Blood Blues* depicts.

Targeting Hiero as ‘Negro’ is paramount to understand the impact and importance of blackness and its different readings in the novel. Also, the multiracial nature of the Hot-Time Swingers, with the preeminence of its black members, offer an interesting ground to underscore the intrinsic link between race and memory. Spanish Canadianist Pilar Cuder-Domínguez has studied perfectly the ‘oblique kinds of blackness’ that *Half Blood Blues* presents. Cuder-Domínguez (2017: 90) explains that

Edugyan’s strong focus on the workings of racialization during the troubled 1930s and 1940s in Europe emphasizes the grammar of the readability of race on the basis of predetermined ideological positions, by setting up contrasting situations in which non-whiteness is visible or invisible to the viewer, and when the former, by looking into how it is construed.

The invisibility of black people in Germany requests the need to reclaim their presence if only through remembering and memory, as Edugyan’s novel –and some recent ones, as previously stated– reclaim. Although in her book *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* Michelle Wright (2004: 185) elucidates that “Afro-Germans can trace their origins back to the nineteenth century, if not before”, black people in Germany seem to be present, at bottom, from “the Allied occupations after the First and the Second World Wars, and the postwar years, 1950s to the present” (Wright, 2004: 185). Hiero’s subjectivity is therefore molded in the first period mentioned by Wright and presented as a flawed German from the very beginning. His mixed-race identity⁴ transforms him into a “Rhineland Bastard”. Eventually, Hiero’s characterization as a black German singles him out “as the occupation deepened” (Edugyan, 2011a: 9). In Sid’s words: “Hiero was a Mischling, a half-breed, but so dark no soul ever like to guess his mama a white Rhineland. Hell, his skin glistened like pure oil” (Edugyan, 2011a:

⁴ By creating a mixed-race character, Edugyan, as an African Canadian writer, participates in the representation of mixed-racedness from Canada to a global experience. For a nuanced discussion of mixed-race subjectivities of Canada and beyond see Fraile-Marcos (2012a) and (2012b) or Sharma (2011).

9). His blue-black skin defines him as a “savage talking like he civilized” (Edugyan, 2011a: 9). Concisely, “(s)ince purity was paramount in the German conception of citizenship, “mixed-blood” (*Mischling*) was irrelevant to citizenship law; citizenships could not be ‘mixed’” (McKibbin, 2014: 416).

Then, Hiero’s identity as an Afro-German citizen is doomed from the beginning simply because “even after the soldiers were sent home, and Hitler re-occupied the Rhineland, these children were seen as a part of a significant insult for Germany. A cultural stain” (Edugyan, 2011a: 54). Unlike Sid, whose light skin can allow him to pass⁵, Hiero’s blackness signals him as target for non-Aryan and, consequently, non-German confirming that “anti-Black discourse renders the history of these native-born Blacks as foreign” (Wright, 2004: 185). In her insightful article on racial impurity and belonging in Nazi-era Germany, Molly McKibbin (2014: 413) duly explains that

Half-Blood Blues challenges the foundational claims to purity that characterize the long-established conception of Germanness by depicting impure Germanness. By portraying blackness and jazz as unquestionably German and thus demonstrating the Germanness of non-Aryan race and culture, Edugyan’s novel subverts the conventional –and still prominent– understanding of Germanness and gestures toward the growing conundrum of Western European nations: how to reconcile black citizenry with a white cultural, national, and racial “heritage”.

That is why, as Pilar Cuder-Domínguez notes, passing becomes important in a novel that revolves around the importance of race and racial profile, and so “racial passing is codified in the novel. It consistently bears negative connotations, most often being associated to a kind of self-erasure and self-denial” (Cuder-Domínguez, 2017: 98).

Race and memory are binary couplets that infuse meaning to the characterization of Hiero and the black members of the band. This is why in the documentary that Sid and Chip attend in Berlin in the

⁵ The act of passing for white was a strategy adopted by black people to eschew the many disadvantages and violence impinged on them. Recent theorists that revisit such cultural phenomenon, as black Canadian writer and scholar Wayde Compton (2010: 24), conclude “that racial passing is usually seen as a deceptive act, one in which the person deliberately chooses to adopt another ancestry, and as a result is often perceived as a morally questionable one” (quoted in Cuder-Domínguez, 2017: 98).

contemporary chapter of the novel –“Berlin 1992”– as an homage to Hiero’s figure, the narrator offers a pedagogical explanation of what it meant to be black in Nazi-era Germany: “(l)ife for black people under the Third Reich...was extremely contradictory. This is because there were so many different types of black people, and their treatment depended on what group they belonged to” (Edugyan, 2011a: 53). However, in the twenties Europe had welcomed black entertainers and, thanks to the openness of the Versailles Treaty, jazz music entered the German market –from Paris to Berlin. In this way, black musicians could resort to jazz as a cultural and social outlet through which to express themselves, get a voice and visualize a denied presence. However, the Nazi regime also despised jazz music, having the SS indict it as “that fucking nigger music” (Edugyan, 2011a: 99). In tune with this atmosphere, the band starts to be persecuted on account of their race and ‘degenerate’ music. So, they are impelled to live hidden in gothic spots that offer the chance to share repressed feelings and memories as well as to give vent to their own heavy-hearted stories.

Race and memory work in tandem within the gothic scene to voice the stories of black people from the US and Canada to the heart of Europe. More precisely, Sid and Chip, as African Americans escaping from the restrictive codes of Jim Law and segregation, offer Hiero’s life as the testimony of Afro-Europeanness. Building on the legacy of slavery –which, paradoxically, and thanks to the redemptive creed of the written word in the protestant culture, favoured the testimonies of enslaved African American people– Sid will breath Hiero’s story into life according to his remembering and his biased memorial episodes. In other words, memory and gothic tropes go hand in hand in the novel to enlighten the tragic life of Hiero, the Afro-European subject.

Clarence Lusane (2003: 2) affirms that “(t)he existence of blackness under Hitler raises not only the issue of identity and resistance but also the issue of an identity of resistance. The construction (in many ways imposition) of blackness from above struggled with the reality of an unformed blackness from below”. Hiero and the band represent this type of ‘blackness from below’ that resists in their ongoing quest for freedom, self-expression and, eventually, recognition. Forced to stay under shelter, the cellar where the band hid and where they were later on discovered in is the typical gothic scenario that catalyzes the group’s unity –“walls painted a deep maroon and the black furniture give it a gloomy

feel” (Edugyan, 2011a: 115). Even the beautiful Delilah, who comes to offer them the chance to escape to France to get a record deal, appears as “ghostly, a phantom of other times” (Edugyan, 2011a: 116) in such frightening circumstances. Back from the cellar, the club where they used to play and in whose cellar they now hide, has turned into a rather graveyard-like spot: “here in the club, all its lights down, it felt cool, nearly cold. I lived in my overcoat. The stage was dim, the houselights real slow, and the broken chairs was piled up in the shadows under the stage. The air reeked eerily of old roses” (Edugyan, 2011a: 117). The rotten architecture of their hideout mirrors the social state they are in: “the club was numbingly cold. It was the height of summer, and we was trapped frozen and afraid inside” (Edugyan, 2011a: 128).

They become undesired guests in Germany and, therefore, being trapped in a country where there is no room for black subjectivities, the members of the group stand no chance other than escaping to France. Prior to the escape, though, we are faced with some clues that will eventually lead to the discovery of Sid’s betrayal. In the midst of this gothic scene, the band puts forth an array of relationships and a traffic of affect and disaffection that need to be weed out from Sid’s interactive frameworks of memory and, consequently, from his account of the facts. In the transition from Berlin to Paris, Sid falls for Delilah and is unable to cope with the fact that she is enthralled with Hiero as a jazz trumpeter extraordinaire. Things get worse between Sid and Hiero when Delilah suggests that jazz legend Louis Armstrong awaits them in Paris to meet with the band with the sole intention of chatting with Hiero. So, Paris, “the city of love” (Edugyan, 2011a: 220), will be down to stand for the city of betrayal. Besides, Hiero’s identity in jeopardy as an Afro-German in Berlin is mirrored in Paris because Delilah warns the band that: “(w)e declared war on Germany. Yesterday afternoon” (Edugyan, 2011a: 230). Hiero becomes the enemy in Germany and in Paris. Afro-Europeanness is unattainable and the black geographies previously summoned seem to lead nowhere for Hiero. The gifted trumpeter’s identity embodies the total exclusion and his presence becomes a living ghost prior to his disappearance. While in Paris, he is obliged to walk through the streets in silence, hoping to be mistaken for a “Senegalese soldier” (Edugyan, 2011a: 300). Yet, as the Germans troop advance and Paris starts to surrender, the prerogative of the colonial soldier wears off and Hiero’s blackness signals again his identity as a target to the extent

that French citizens attack him in a gothic context of chaos and obscurity: “He was sitting with his head slouched down between his knees, his hands clasped loose before him. Delilah was crouched in front of him, her back to the crowd. His clothes hung slack like he just stolen from the laundry line, and sitting there in that pool of fabric he looked totally shrunken” (Edugyan, 2011a: 299). This episode is also infused with gothicism for out of it, again, they are locked up in the tiny flat in which they all transmute into ghostly subjects: “our faces blurred in the glass, ghosts” (Edugyan, 2011a: 301).

And still, Sid’s light skin guarantees survival, and Chip’s dark skin is salvaged for his nationality. Conversely, Hiero’s Afro-Europeaness remains to be the only target as Chip himself clears out: “If you a black American, well, you treated alright...But if you a black Kraut, a Mischling, like our boy here– he glanced at Hiero. Well. It get real ugly” (Edugyan, 2011a: 260). Again, Hiero’s black European identity turns from being an undesirable guest to a ghost. This is so for the reason that “to be German, then, to be a citizen, one had to be of German stock. And since German stock was defined specifically as possessing a Germanic Aryan ancestry, Germany was able to codify in law the concept of *völkisch* as it legally defined Germanness (Molly McKibbin, 2014: 415). On account of his skin and ancestry, Hiero is out of the *völkisch* –or else the Nazis’ notion of national/racial/cultural identity– and therefore his exclusion is all the more certified.

On this ground, Hiero’s complete exclusion brings into view his living ghost condition and leaves him no hope but to give up on fighting: “the kid just stopped eating... He got the look of something hunted... There was a darkness blooming in him” (Edugyan, 2011a: 286). Hiero’s status as a ghost –because of his social exclusion and personal invisibility– is read in a postcolonial gothic stand since it functions as a “signal of atrocities, marking sites of an untold violence, a traumatic past whose traces remain to attest to the fact of a lack of testimony” (Luckhurst, 1996: 247).

Indeed, Hiero’s voice is unheard for the most part of the story. Sid’s jazzy and vernacular voice recounts the tale and it is only once the mystery of Hiero’s real destiny is revealed when we get to listen to Hiero’s real voice. Edugyan has concurrently premised a narrative in which the act of re-memory is tantalized by trauma, jealousy and betrayal. Memory works with the greater effort to recompose the facts according to

the subject. Sid's memory is not only selective but also fragmented. However, rooted in the tradition of the African American privilege of testimonial acts, Sid winds up admitting defeat and confesses his betrayal in the end. Interestingly, Edugyan places this moment of epiphany shaped up in a revision of a foundational black literary trope: the talking book. This trope bespeaks about the importance of reading the Bible to find the clues to reclaim self-understanding and, eventually, to seek freedom through understanding. Black slaves used this literary trope for a twofold purpose: to work over their identity and to come to terms with their past and present. Following this strategy, the events of the story, and their suspense, are invigorated when Chip gets off his chest that he received a letter from Hiero in which he concedes that he is alive and living in Poland. Sid's dismay is more than evident because he is shocked by the news and also because he has not received any letter. His inability to read Sid's letter (Edugyan, 2011a: 30) will be amended once he has revisited his past to accept the actual betrayal and therefore to come to terms with memory and truth. This seems to be, according to Edugyan's literary skills, the only way to acknowledge Hiero's Afro-European selfhood in (hi)story. Fittingly, when Sid finally discovers the letter and finds out that Hiero might well be alive his *lieux de memoire*, citing Pierre Nora, pushes him towards a redemptory understanding and towards reconciliation. It is sensible to say that Nora's coinage to read the restorative use of memory is adequate to Sid's haunting since this so-called *lieux de memoire*, Nora reassures (1989: 7), establishes "a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past" reflects a healing process "bound up with the sense that memory has been torn—but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists".

In the last section of the novel, the conflicting presence of Afro-Europeanness is to be upheld. Sid recalls Louis Armstrong's advice when he is rebuffed from the people who would finally make the record Half Blood Blues. This moment—together with his passionate jealousy over Delilah—turns Sid against Hiero, who is praised as the lead trumpeter for the record. Armstrong tells a premonitory saying that Sid will recall and live up to in the final part of the narration: "You got the talent of making others your kin, your blood" (Edugyan, 2011a: 276). So, Sid goes back over the moment in which the band got finally to record

the song that gives the title to the novel because only in that moment the whole band felt the freedom they longed: “We was all of us free” (Edugyan, 2011a: 310). In order to redeem his guilt and to achieve total freedom, a freedom in which he can fully participate after his excruciating exercise of re-memory, Sid aims to make amends, order the scattered pieces of his memorial accounts and meet up the surprisingly alive Hiero to accept the truth. That is, to wholeheartedly accept his presence not as a ghost but as a companion, as Armstrong suggested, and to voice and legitimize this black presence in Europe for real.

The giddy retelling of the story, with the blanks that the reader needs to be filling in as the narrative spreads up, reinforces the empowering tool of memory in this exercise of literary *hauntology*. Tellingly because, following Aleida Assman’s useful allegation (2008, n. p.): “(w)hat we remember is not based on what actually happened, but on what we later can and wish to tell a story about. What is and is not remembered from the past depends on who needs the story and for what purpose”. Hence, Sid’s remorse at the end of his recounting – “a darkness at the edge of my thoughts. Every day of my life” (Edugyan, 2011a: 326) – symbolizes the necessity to acknowledge Afro-European-ness as something more than just a memory. When Sid and Chip arrive in Poland and finally discover Hiero’s house, the past melts into the present and only Hiero’s subjectivity –being alive– acts as now as the embodiment of the living memory of black Europeans. Edugyan’s final turn corroborates the need for “(t)he reinsertion of Blacks into the historical process that gave rise to and drove perhaps the most decisive social and moral moments of the 20th century” (Lusane, 2005: 3).

After a touching reencounter, Sid and Chip find out that Hiero –re-named Thomas after his escape from the Nazis– is now blind. Rather than being a hindrance, his blindness allows him to mold sculptures that represent his way out of his past traumas. The gothic spaces that the three of them were forced to inhabit throughout the narrative are now transmogrified into a cozy and real house where Hiero enjoys his days passing on his former ghostly essence to his sculptures. With his subjectivity accommodated in full comfort, Hiero’s blindness grants him the chance to avoid Sid’s guilty gaze when he confesses that Hiero got caught by the Nazis because he hid his passport and therefore he was unable to escape from France. The painful confession makes us read

Hiero's detention, as told in the first chapter, with different eyes. Precisely the eyesight that Hiero lacks.

Though rejection does expel throughout the novel, at the final point it folds in on itself to render a new meaning of Afro-Europeanness through Hiero's embracing attitude towards his betrayal. In a pedagogic act of inclusion, Edugyan conscientiously transmutes the rejected guest—forever excluded in Europe, that is, an embodied ghost—into a nurturing host that debunks the Gothicism of his un-excludable presence looming over the history of Europe. From ghost to host, Hiero's identity as an Afro-European subject is salvaged and secured in a restitution of roles that, in Thar Ben Jelloun's words (1999: 2), "both honors and humanizes the host...as someone capable of sharing". Hiero's ultimate transition from ghost to host and to human, capable of forgiving and providing hospitality, resolves into a rehabilitated version of Afro-Europeanness, as Sid notes: "those eyes so pale they might've witnessed the ruin of the world, the ruin and rebirth of a world" (Edugyan, 2011a: 342). A world in which black Europeanness can be reconciled.

Far from the gothic spaces that blackness was used to inhabit, Hiero's home welcomes the maturity of different black subjectivities in Europe in a secure home of protected hospitality⁶ ready to re-accommodate the entity of black people through the collective bond of culture. This final move is beautifully expressed with Hiero's last words which demand to listen, again, to the record that banded them together now that they are ready to face its (hi)story in unison: "Turn it...Play it again" (Edugyan, 2011a: 343).

In this final regard, and as a sort of Afro-European Tiresias, Hiero's living presence catalyzes their healing with the cultural outlet that united them across their European trajectories of exclusion and racism and the tenet that gave them their unique sense of belonging: music. The moment of forgiveness and redemption comes when the three of them gather to listen to music in a graceful act of real bonding that is finally read as something real and not imagined or retold: "it wasn't a

⁶ I turn here to Jacques Derrida's use of hospitality since it applies to Hiero's redemptive ethos at the end of the novel. Hiero's home, in Derrida's terms, appears able to defer to the inclusion of blackness because it showcases "the very place of protected hospitality...of truth, thus limiting the gift proffered and making of this limitation, namely, the being-oneself on one's own home, the condition of the gift and of hospitality" (Derrida, 2000: 4).

dream” (Edugyan, 2011a: 337). The real victory of memory, Edugyan seems to be implying, falls back on the importance of the testimony of survivors rather than in the systematic tendency of centering on sheer victimhood. Hiero’s survival ethos represents the suppressed memory of Afro-Europeanness, and the necessity to rethink the violence that accompanies the presence of black Europeans in order to reinterpret the real histories and stories of a tarnished continent. Hiero’s memory takes center stage at the end to replace, if not mend, Sid’s tormented recalling of the past and blameworthy lacunae just to infuse a restorative use of memory –or best, re-memory– disrupting *hauntology* as something that, otherwise, may be cathartic and healing, for it “forever *returns, re-enters and re-writes*” (Lai, 2003: 502).

So, I side with Cuder-Domínguez’s remark (2017: 102) that “*Half Blood Blues* should be framed within the larger, ongoing project to disrupt the entrenched notion of Europe as a white continent, revising European cultural memory with the insertion of black subjectivities and bodies”. Furthermore, I would add that Edugyan’s bold move and ambitious transnational scope in the novel posits the representation and presence of blackness from the US to Canada and all the way to Europe –“from without and within”– to focus more on the routes than in the roots that partake from the legacy of slavery and racial oppression and opens new and fresh representation of black subjectivities best understood in interaction with each other rather than in isolation.

3. Conclusion

On the whole, *Half Blood Blues* offers an interesting opportunity to both (re)think and (re)tell the histories of black people in Europe from the outbreak of the Great War up until the present and to recast the trajectories of black subjectivities expanding Paul Gilroy’s reductive framework of the Black Atlantic. As she also brought out in her debut novel, Edugyan’s second work persists on representing a bold literary experiment that expands the (African) Canadian literary canon in a globalized and interconnected world. The novel charges the reader to take part in its scattered accounts of the story to unravel the difficulties that the different black characters endured in Inter-war Europe. By presenting a story that hovers between Nazi-era Berlin and occupied Paris, Edugyan participates in questioning the categories of racializa-

tion and belonging, especially applied to the subjectivity of Hiero as an Afro-German denizen, that is, as an Afro-European. As this essay has tried to demonstrate, focusing on the imbrication of memories filtered through a dollop of (postcolonial) gothic scenarios, Edugyan debunks the cultural guilt that is unrelentingly associated with social processes of subject formation for black Europeans in the Third Reich by visualizing the historically hidden (hi)stories of Afro-European experiences. Indeed, the imbrication of memory and racial exclusion permeate the novel and provide the propitious context to create a sophisticated conundrum equipped to expose the haunting that escorts the open-ended erasure that has historically defined Afro-Europeanness. Interestingly, the novel parallels different types of blackness so that the reader be able to cast out monolithic versions of racialization processes. In so doing, Edugyan taps a rich, complex and little-known vein of black history in Europe outlined on the needed dialogue between European history and its colonial endeavor. Although *Half Blood Blues* is at once packed with conflicting memory processes and the hopelessness of gothic and excruciating spots, it ends with a positive note defined by inclusion, affect and hospitality aiming –as embodied in Hiero– to shed light to the positivity of survivors who tell a tale of persistence and reliance in an inclusive future open to finally acknowledge Afro-Europe in full comfort.

References

- Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Assman, Aleida. 2008. Rememberance as a Resource for Legitimation. Web. Accessed Feb. 2019.
- Assman, Jan. 1995. Collective Memory and Cultural Identity. Trans. John Czaplicka. *New German Critique* 65: 125-33.
- Compton, Wayde. 2010. *After Canaan: Essays on Race, Writing, and Region*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp.
- Cucarella-Ramon, Vicent. 2015. Liminality and (Trans)Nationalism in the Rethinking of African Canadian Subjectivity: Esi Edugyan's. *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne. Canada and Beyond: a Journal of Canadian Literary and Cultural* 5: 27-50.

- Cuder-Domínguez, Pilar. 2017. Oblique Kinds of Blackness in Esi Edugyan's *Half Blood Blues*. *Atlantis: Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies* 39(2): 89-104.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1994. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge.
- Derrida, Jacques. 2000. Hostipitality. Trans. Barry Stocker and Forbes Morolock. *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 5(3): 3-18.
- Edugyan, Esi (2004) 2005. *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne*. New York: Harper Paperback.
- Edugyan, Esi. 2011a. *Half Blood Blues*. London: Serpent's Tail.
- Edugyan, Esi. 2011b (November 10). Black in Nazi Germany. Esi Edugyan about her Novel *Half Blood Blues*. *Afro-Europe. International Blog*. <https://afroeuropa.blogspot.com/2011/11/black-in-nazi-germany-esi-edugyan-about.html> [Accessed 18/02/2019].
- Fraile-Marcos, Ana María. When Race Does Not Matter, "except to everyone else": Mixed Race Subjectivity and the Fantasy of a Post-Racial Canada in Lawrence Hill and Kim Barry Brunhuber. In Darias-Beautell, Eva (ed.) *Unruly Penelopes and the Ghosts: Narratives of English Canada*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier UP. 77-105.
- Fraile-Marcos, Ana María. 2012. Urban Heterotopias and Racialization in Kim Barry Brunhuber's *Kameleon Man*. *Canadian Literature* 214(3): 68-89.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Ed. Donald F. Bouchard. Trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. Ithaca: Cornell UP.
- Gilroy, Paul. 1993. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London: Verso.
- Gordon, Avery F. (1997) 2008. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P.
- Hodgins, Peter. 2004. Our Haunted Present: Cultural Memory in Question. *Topia* 12: 99-108.
- Huyssen, Andreas. 1995. *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Isherwood, Isaiah (1935) 2008. *Berlin's Stories*. New York: Literary Bent.
- Jelloun, Tahar Ben. (1984) 1999. *French Hospitality: Racism and North African Immigrants*. Trans. Barbara Ray. New York: Columbia UP.
- Lai, Chung-Hsiung. 2003. Re-Writing the Subject: The Thrownness of Being in the Multicultural Condition. *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 30 (3-4): 495-503.
- Lowenthal, David. 1985. *The Past Is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

- Luckhurst, Robert. 2008. *The Trauma Question*. London: Routledge.
- Lusane, Clarence. 2002. *Hitler's Black Victims*. New York: Routledge.
- Martínez-Alfaro, María Jesús & Pellicer-Ollín, Silvia (eds.). 2017. *Memory Frictions in Contemporary Literature*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Massaquoi, Hnas-Jürgen, 1999. *Destined to Witness: Growing Up Black in Nazi Germany*. New York: William Morrow.
- McFadden, Bernice L. 2016. *The Book of Harlan*. Plymouth: Jacaranda Books Art Music Limited.
- McKibbin, Molly Littlewood. 2014. Subverting the German Volk: Racial and Musical Impurity in Esi Edugyan's *Half Blood Blues*. *Callaloo* 37(2): 413-431.
- McKittrick, Katherine & Woods, Clyde (eds.). 2007. *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*. Toronto: Bewteen the Lines.
- Morrison, Toni. 1987. *Beloved*. London: Picador.
- Nora, Pierre. 1989. Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*. Trans. Marc Roudebush. Memory and Counter-Memory. Spec. Issue of *Representations* 26: 7-24.
- Pinckney, Darryl. 2017. *Black Deutschland*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Girou.
- Parkinson Zamora, Lois. 1997. *The Usable Past: The Imagination of History in Recent Fiction of the Americas*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Sharma, Nitasha. 2011. Pacific Revisions of Blackness: Blacks Address Race and Belonging in Hawai'i. *Amerasia Journal* 37(3): 43-60.
- Sugars, Cynthia & Tucotte, Gerry (eds.). 2009. *Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic*. Waterloo: Wilfried Laurier UP.
- Sugars, Cynthia & Ty, Eleanor (eds.) 2014. *Canadian Literature and Cultural Memory*. Ontario: Oxford University Press.
- Tiffin, Helen. 1996. Plato's Cave: Educational and Cultural Practices. In King, Bruce (ed) *New National and Post-Colonial Literatures: An Introduction*. Oxford: Claredon, 143-163.
- Winter, Jay. 2011. The Generation of Memory: Reflections on the 'Memory Boom' in Contemporary Historical Studies. *Canadian Military History* 10(3): 57-66.
- Wright, Michelle. *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora*. Durham, NC: Duke UP.

