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MARLEEN DE WITTE

Black citizenship, Afropolitan critiques: vernacular heritage-making and the negotiation of race in the Netherlands

This paper offers a new perspective on the relationship between the contested terrain of race and the politics of heritage and belonging in postcolonial Europe. Presenting material from the Netherlands, I argue that instead of reproducing the dyadic white-majority–black-minority framework, we must situate the negotiation of race in the triangular relationship between the persistent 'whiteness' of Dutch nationhood, the country's postcolonial Afro-Caribbean population and its more recent African postmigrant population. Discussing 'African heritage' projects by young Dutch people of Afro-Caribbean and Ghanaian descent respectively, I discern two different critiques of the racialised exclusivity of Dutchness. Struggles for 'Black citizenship' seek recognition of African heritage as part of Dutch colonial history and seek to inscribe Blackness into Dutch nationhood; 'Afropolitan' celebrations of 'being African in the world' not only question the primacy of Dutch national belonging but also resist hegemonic formulations of Blackness. In this 'trialogue', race gets done and undone in intersection with other axes of difference and inequality, including citizenship status, migration trajectory and African origin. The triadic framework the paper advances not only conveys the complexity of racial dynamics in heritage-making, but also sensitises to alternative understandings of belonging and alternative sources of critique.

Key words race, heritage-making, African diaspora, postcolonial Europe, black citizenship

Introduction

In a critical response to a blog post titled 'What is Afro-Europe? Who are the Afro-Europeans or black Europeans?', a commenter named 'Bazompora' wrote:

In the US, 'Black' and 'African' might be synonymous; but that is not the general case in the Old Worlds, where the One-Drop Rule wasn't mandated. I don't call myself Black, and it is not because I want to distance myself from my 'Dark-Skinned Black' ancestors, but quite the opposite; it is because I, like many 'Afro-Europeans', still have a living connection with Africa and can appreciate the Africans' viewpoint just as much as that of the Europeans: I'm 'White' to my Burundian relatives, 'Brown' to my 'multiracial' Belgian family and, only when I'm the darkest guy around, 'Black' to unrelated White Belgians. But let my Kirundi username serve you as evidence that I am 'proud' about my 'African' heritage, as a legitimate full-fledged Muhanza (clan ID) and Muhutu (ethnicity) – both valid according to the patrilineal inheritance thereof, set up by my Barundi ancestors and having nothing to do with Eurocentric classifications.[1]

[1] http://afroeurope.blogspot.nl/2009/09/what-is-afroeurope-who-are.html, accessed 30 April 2017.

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Bazompora's identity statement immediately raises two issues an anthropology of race and ethnicity in Europe is to engage with, especially if it wants to focus on the dynamics of race in practice. First, the complexity, variability and relationality of race and ethnicity, and the ways in which racial and ethnic formations tie in with notions of heritage, inheritance and belonging. Second, the global circulation and relative standing of racial formations, in particular American ones, and how these relate to (that is: influence, differ from, interact with, seep into, etc.) African, European and Afro-European ones. The relationship between 'black' and 'African' is a central bone of contention in this.

In this article, I turn to the Netherlands to explore the relationship between race and the politics of heritage and belonging as it appears in 'African heritage' projects by young Afro-Dutch people of Caribbean and Ghanaian descent.[2] Conceptualising race as a socially effective practice of categorising people into distinct groups based on selected bodily markers and the meanings and values ascribed to those, I am interested in what connections of natural–cultural belonging (Wade 2014) these projects trace, and how the body appears in this tracing. The material on which I draw forms part of a larger ethnographic study of the social life and aesthetic design of the idea of 'African heritage' among young people of various African and black ancestries. Over the past years, African identity has become a hot topic for debate, as well as a fashionable stylistic trope mobilised in the arena of fashion, lifestyle and entertainment (De Witte 2014, 2017). From these debates and trends, 'African identity' emerges as a search – such as the one for authenticity, e.g., 'discover who you really are' – and a practice of self-making. This process is deeply rooted in a social context in which race has a particular 'absent presence' (Wade 2010; cf. M'charek et al. 2014a): a 'colour-blind' society in which race is denied to exist as a relevant social category, but whose reality is felt on an everyday basis by people of colour (Essed and Hoving 2014; Wekker 2016). While the search for identity, authenticity and selfhood may characterise young people in general, what makes it specifically urgent for young people of colour is their routine experience of having their being and belonging questioned, and of being defined by others, often in negative terms, on the basis of their racially phenotyped bodies and a presumed difference of 'culture' inferred from their appearance. In this context of racialised othering, identity becomes an explicit and often politicised quest for self-definition and self-realisation, both on individual and collective levels.

In this quest, 'African roots' and 'African heritage' appear as key terms. Approaching heritage as 'a mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 7), I see 'African roots' and 'African heritage' not as givens – as something that people simply have – but as *projects*: projects of self-making and of group-making that mobilise genealogical ancestries and cultural pasts as part of individual or collective identities (cf. Van Stipriaan 2011). While research participants often took 'African heritage' as a given resource for identity, the question of who or what is African, and on what grounds, turned out to be far from self-evident and instead much disputed. As pointed out by a recent volume on heritage-making

[2] The hyphenated category of 'Afro-Dutch' has recently grown in usage, especially among Afro-Surinamese Dutch, as a unifying label for all African-descended Dutch people, but is also contested by some of them. There are many cross-cutting terms of self-identification in circulation, and the definition, scope and even relevance of each of them is debated. As all such terms are situational and relational, my own use of terms such as Afro-Caribbean Dutch, Ghanaian Dutch and Moroccan Dutch is decidedly not meant to denote neatly bounded and coherent 'ethnic groups', but, much like participants' own use of ethnic labels, as short-hands.

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(Meyer and Van de Port 2018), heritage is always a construction subject to dynamic processes of reinventing culture within particular social-political formations. Contrary to popular perceptions, Meyer and Van de Port, and the volume's contributors, thus highlight the actual making of heritage, involving both the selection and fashioning of particular items *as* heritage and its naturalisation as an essential ground to group identities. This process includes politics of ownership and works to both include and exclude specific groups. As such, heritage is often subject to debate and contestation (De Witte 2014; Isnart and Leblon 2012), especially in culturally plural societies. A growing body of work in critical heritage studies emphasises how these dynamics of inclusion and exclusion are often highly racialised. That is, the legacies of race 'shape the way […] heritage has been produced and consumed and what and who gets to count as being part of it' (Littler 2005: 1).

While these debates have mostly been focused on how national heritage formations have been racially marked (see also Hall 2005), this article takes the whiteness – or indeed the historical 'whitening' – of Dutch cultural heritage (Balkenhol 2018; Wekker 2016) as a context to which subaltern Dutch citizens are forced to relate and concentrates ethnographic attention on their vernacular heritage projects and the alternative forms of Dutchness they produce. The question I address is how race plays into grassroots heritage-making. More specifically, when and how is 'African heritage' as the mobilisation of cultural pasts made to intersect with Africanness as read – and made readable – in specific physical traits, such as skin colour, hair texture or facial features? As I will point out, in Afro-Dutch heritage-making, race turns out to be a recurring but also a contested and a shifting object, sometimes expressed as 'blackness' and sometimes as 'Africanness', sometimes as a synonymisation of both, and sometimes as a contrast between them. Whereas in the past many black Surinamese and Antillean Dutch distanced themselves from their African peers ('I am black but I am *not* African'),[3] an Afro-Caribbean Dutch interest in and embrace of 'African roots' has been on the rise over the past decade. Many, especially young, people now claim an African identity ('I am black *thus* I am African'). Concurringly, second-generation Ghanaian-Dutch increasingly embrace a 'black' racial identity (different from their parents), but, as we shall see, tend to be critical of subsuming their Africanness to what they perceive as a dominant (transatlantic) framework of blackness. These shifting articulations between blackness and Africanness among current generations of Afro-Dutch, who trace their roots to Africa via different historical routes, call for an understanding of race 'as a phenomenon that emerges through global circulations, and that articulates in local settings' (Balkenhol and Schramm, introduction to this issue; cf. Clarke and Thomas 2006).

Exploring the variability of Afro-Dutch articulations of race in the local setting of Amsterdam, I address broader questions about the production of heritage as a body politic of subaltern belonging in postcolonial and postmigrant Europe. One crucial issue highlighted by the scholarly field of Afro-European or Black European studies (Clark Hine et al. 2009; Espinoza Garrido et al. 2019; López 2009) is the multiplicity of Europe's African diasporas and the relationship between the 'old diaspora' of slavery, which in Europe is mostly a 'double diaspora', and the 'new diaspora' of

[3] Despite older projects of identifying as 'African', in particular in the context of Surinamese nationalism, 'African' had (and still has) a negative connotation that harks back to colonial hierarchies (Mbembe 2017).

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Africa–Europe migration. Several authors have noted the primacy of Black Atlantic formations in African diaspora studies at the expense of more recent, post-Cold War Africa–Europe migrations and their descendant communities (e.g. Zeleza 2005). In cities like London (Codrington 2006) and Amsterdam (De Witte 2019), an earlier Afro-Caribbean dominance has given way to a strong African presence. The multiple and shifting nature of Afro-European populations problematises reductive analyses of race and identity within a dyadic framework of 'white majority' versus 'black minority' populations. To allow for the complexity of racial identity formations, I propose to situate the negotiation of race in the cross-cutting relationships between the persistent 'whiteness' of Dutch nationhood and the country's variously positioned black and African citizenries. In what follows I explore the convergences and divergences between West African and Afro-Caribbean Dutch as they produce 'African heritage' as part of their identity projects. Seeking to grasp the dynamics of race in practice, the question I address is how race is done and undone in these Afro-Dutch negotiations around heritage, identity and belonging. What cultural and historical elements are mobilised as 'African heritage' and how do these come to be linked to particular bodies and people? Approaching these questions in terms of self-making and group-making, I show how racialised social and cultural identities emerge in young people's heritage practice.

My discussion is based on seven years of close observation of the field, including ethnographic fieldwork in Amsterdam (participant observation of events and everyday contexts, in-depth interviews with key actors and informal talks, conducted most intensively between 2014 and 2017 by myself and my research assistants Gladys Akom Ankobrey and Rita Ouedraogo) as well as participant observation in online environments. As a background, I first sketch the contemporary dynamics of race, identity and politics of belonging in the Netherlands and briefly describe the history and multiplicity of the Dutch African diaspora. Discussing a number of Amsterdam-based African heritage projects, the following sections trace the multiple genealogies of 'African heritage' and components of race as they emerge and intersect in creative projects. All seeking to intervene in dominant frameworks of identity and belonging, the projects exemplify different interventions, which I analyse as a struggle for black citizenship and as Afropolitan critique respectively. These critiques articulate race in different, cross-cutting ways. Comparing these ways brings out the various intersections and relations within which race is produced and negotiated in practice and calls for an understanding of race as part of the production and circulation of categories of difference and belonging on multiple spatial levels.

Race, identity and the politics of belonging in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands today, two major tendencies regarding race, identity and national belonging seem to hold each other in contradictory embrace, reflecting both the historical configurations of 'racial Europeanization' (Goldberg 2006) and an alternative, racially inclusive 'Europeanization from below' (El-Tayeb 2011). On one hand, anxieties run wild around 'Dutch identity', perceived by many to be under threat by ethnic and religious diversity and the alleged 'migration crisis'. Since the proclaimed

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death of multiculturalism, the current public and political climate witnesses a return to ethnocultural nationalism, combined with a stubborn clinging to the myth of a 'colour-blind' nation where race does not matter and all are equal. Indeed, the paradox of race in the Netherlands, Gloria Wekker argues in her book *White Innocence* (2016), is that the persistence of a colonially formed structure of racialised othering goes together with a remarkably resilient postcolonial amnesia and an overwhelming denial of racial discrimination, in particular (but not only) on the part of the white majority.[4] In practice, dominant notions of Dutch identity and (non)belonging are heavily racialised, inflected by a regime of visible difference directed at the 'phenotypic other' (M'charek et al. 2014b) in everyday encounters, including the popular ascription of the label *allochtoon* to people who 'look different'. In this context, black (and other 'phenotypically different') Dutch youth, born and raised in the Netherlands, face ongoing questioning of their Dutchness, and of the legitimacy of their being in the country.

Against this persistent but unspeakable 'whiteness' of an imagined Dutch nationhood, the reality of another nationhood is increasingly coming into view and into voice: a Dutch nationhood that is culturally and racially plural and hybrid. This nation has always been there, constituted as it is by the country's long histories of empire and migration, but its reality has hardly become part of established notions about who or what is 'really Dutch'. With new generations of postcolonial and postmigrant Dutch citizens growing in numbers and assertiveness, however, especially in the cities, new, alternative formulations of belonging are on the rise. As I discuss in detail below, they are carving out new spaces for hyphenated identities and redefining the idea of Dutchness (e.g. Landvreugd 2016). The recent emergence of the hyphenated category of 'Afro-Dutch' as part of black Dutch (especially Afro-Surinamese) projects of self-identification and social-cultural critique is one manifestation of this. So is the new wave of black emancipation and anti-racism currently under way. More than ever before, this movement is driven by young people, embedded in European-wide networks and activism, and inspired by globalising social movements such as Black Lives Matter. In this context, shared experiences of phenotypic othering 'force [black youth] to recognize their commonality as "blacks" or "Africans"' (Blakely 2005: 593) *and* urge them to proclaim that they too are Dutch.[5] Their 'commonality as "blacks"' in the face of everyday racism (Essed 1990), however, is cross-cut by significant historical, cultural (including religious and linguistic), and socio-economic distinctions between, as well as within, various African-descended groups in the Netherlands. These distinctions, I argue, complicate their 'commonality as Africans' and disrupt taken-for-granted notions of 'Afro-Dutch' or 'the Dutch African diaspora' as unifying categories.

The oldest and largest African-descended population in the Netherlands results from the Dutch participation in the transatlantic slave trade and Dutch colonial rule in Suriname, the Dutch Antilles and Aruba. This is a very heterogeneous 'double diaspora'

[4] Far from being a naturally occurring, monolithic entity, a 'white majority' is itself produced through racialised narratives about 'ethnic minorities' (Jones 2014) and enacted through everyday interactions between those racialised as white and 'ethnic others'.

[5] 'I too am Dutch' is a social media campaign (Ook Ik Ben Nederlands) started in 2014 by ethnic minority youth to address their everyday experiences of exclusion from Dutchness (http://ookikbennederlands.tumblr.com/ Accessed July 2019).

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constituted by forced migration out of (West) Africa to the Caribbean and later migration to the Dutch 'motherland' during colonial and postcolonial times. While their belonging to – and in most cases their citizenship of – the Netherlands is thus rooted in centuries of colonial history, Dutch postcolonial amnesia and phenotypic othering has made their blackness a marker of non-belonging. Substantial sub-Saharan African migration to the Netherlands started in the 1980s, when political and economic crises in several African countries forced many to seek greener and safer pastures abroad, and intensified after the end of the Cold War. This has given rise to significant African diasporic populations from countries not formerly colonised by the Netherlands and with living connections to concrete places in Africa. In Amsterdam, Ghanaians now form a major group. Many of them have acquired Dutch citizenship or official residence, while a large number are still 'working on papers' while making a living in 'illegality'. A second generation born and/or raised in the Netherlands is now coming of age, with many now in their twenties and entering public and professional life.

Particularly revealing of the negotiated boundaries of Africanness and the complex ways in which race plays into heritage-making is the variable inclusion and exclusion of people of North African descent in African heritage projects. The large population of Moroccan-Dutch are not usually (self-)identified as 'African', despite their roots on the African continent. This reveals a strong yet often taken-for-granted racialised conflation of 'African' with sub-Saharan African or black. As I discuss below, some African heritage projects explicitly include Moroccan cultural heritage so as to problematise the dominant racialisation of African as black, and some Moroccan-Dutch, most of whom are of Amazigh origin, are becoming interested in their 'African roots'.

This multiplicity of the Dutch African diasporas raises questions about how different, postcolonial and postmigrant groups are variously positioned with regard to questions of belonging, identity and citizenship in the Netherlands. How do these differences play out? What new collective identifications do young, Dutch-born generations form around notions of 'Blackness', 'Africanness' or 'Afro-Dutchness'? What various histories and heritages are mobilised as part of these formations? And what is race made to do in these? I now turn to these questions.

Performing African heritage as Black history

The first 'African heritage' project to be discussed is the annual Black History Festival in Amsterdam Southeast, which is home to the city's largest black population (mainly of Afro-Surinamese and Ghanaian descent). A grassroots initiative by several Afro-Caribbean Dutch community leaders, the festival was first organised in 2013 as part of the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in the Dutch kingdom. Inspired by similar projects in the USA and the UK, it brings together a variety of locally based performing arts projects within a larger framework of youth empowerment, talent development and black consciousness. On 7 June 2014, I visited the Black History Festival, this year themed 'empowerment', in community centre No Limit. As I arrived early in the evening, an African fashion and jewellery stand was being put up in the hallway. The pre-programme 'empowerment session' was about to start and people were trickling in. The founder of an ethnic-minority student organisation talked about how the legacy of race thinking and slavery still works in the present and what we can do to 'empower the Afro or Black community'; a professional coach spoke about

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staying loyal to who you are and 'standing in your power'; and the founder of a black 'natural hair' beauty pageant asked why 'we [black women] do all we can to look as little as Africans as possible' and stated that real beauty starts learning to love your real self and show it.

In the main hall, half-filled with a predominantly Surinamese audience, the festival programme started with a video reportage made for the occasion by BijlmerEnzo, a local youth media team, covering a discussion among themselves about whether they, as black persons, are African or not. They are shown not to agree and come up with different arguments. The video thus immediately introduced African identity as a topic for discussion and disagreement. The festival host, a cultural entrepreneur and black activist publicly known as Kunta Rincho, then took over to open the evening: 'Well, *I* think that there are a lot of Africans in the house tonight. Maybe not everyone agrees, but then at least people with African roots.' A woman sitting next to me in the audience remarked, somewhat sceptically and audibly only to those around her, 'life started in Africa, everybody is from Africa'. On stage, Rincho – with well-trimmed beard and long dreadlocks, dressed in red three-quarter pants, light grey dress jacket, wooden necklace with Africa-shaped pendant, two Africa-shaped earrings and a black 1873 button[6] – continued:

> Welcome to the Black History festival, the festival where we draw inspiration from African history and African culture. Then why not African History festival? Because a lot of people when they hear African history, they think it's not about them. But most of them would not deny that they are black, or we need to start a whole discussion about I am not black, I'm brown, coloured, et cetera. It *is* a hot topic these days: who am I? Am I African? Am I black? Am I Afro-Dutch? Am I the N-word?

During an intermezzo of audience interaction in between the performances, Rincho indeed evoked this discussion by asking people in the audience 'what are you?' Few were ready to identify themselves as African and disagreement arose. 'Surinamese', the first interviewee said. 'Born in Suriname?' 'No, in the Netherlands.' 'Then how?' 'Well, my parents and my grandfather are from Suriname.' 'I see,' Rincho said, 'is there anyone who is born in Suriname and says I am not Surinamese?' Otmar Watson, organiser of the festival, stood up and said: 'I am born in Suriname, but I am an African. It doesn't matter where you are born, you are simply an African.' A lady sitting close to him rose to object: 'No, I am born in the Netherlands and I am Surinamese.' 'Well,' Watson answered, 'Surinamese is a nationality, but ethnically, that is to say your anatomical features, you are Javanese or African or …' 'But I am a mix of Hindustani, Creole, and Chinese', the lady said, resisting both a singular ethnic label and Watson's prioritising of 'anatomical features'. Watson then addressed the audience as a whole and explained that Africans come in various skin tones, ranging from light to dark brown, and that while many Surinamese mention the ethnic mix that they are, very few acknowledge the African in themselves. From this perspective, the festival was to promote African consciousness among a community with a highly complex history of ethnic mixing and categorisation and to put the often-erased connection with Africa – rooted in the colonial denigration of Africanness – centre stage.

[6] The button commemorates the fact that after the formal abolition of slavery in the Dutch colonies in 1863, formerly enslaved persons were obliged to work on the plantations for ten more years.

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The line-up, however, featured a variety of local youth performance groups, some distinctly African-oriented and others hardly so. The opening act was Untold Empowerment, a dance and theatre group founded by Watson and targeted at 'engaging Afro-Dutch youth in knowing and valuing their identity and culture' so as to strengthen their self-esteem (see De Witte 2014). Using a variety of West African and Afro-Caribbean music and dance styles, but mainly 'African traditional dance', the group produces theatre and dance shows that tell 'the untold story' of 'what is left in the Netherlands of the tradition and culture of the African diaspora'. At the Black History Festival they gave an energetic show of 'African traditional' drumming and dance, the percussionists dressed in African wax print shirts and knee-long jeans and the dancers in kente-print outfits. After this, theatre group Ethnical File performed a sketch about what was introduced as a 'sensitive topic' within the Afro-Surinamese community: 'superstition' and 'rituals', in this case the use of blueing powder against 'evil eyes' and taboos around menstruation. The audience's active engagement expressed a mixture of pleasurable recognition, humorous distancing and discomfort. After a hip hop dance performance that made no explicit reference to Africa, Africa was back on stage with the closing performance by Black Harmony, an Afro-Surinamese male a-capella singing group, bringing, as Rincho announced, 'old African culture in a new coat; decolonizing this culture as much as possible'. Black Harmony makes songs in Sranantongo inspired by the Afro-Surinamese winti religion. Lead singer Orlando Ceder told me that for him 'winti is a religion and not a culture, because winti does not discriminate according to skin colour or ethnicity and is open to anyone'. Still, the song they sang at the Black History Festival strongly appealed to feelings of nostalgia towards Africa as the ancient motherland, the ties with whom were violently cut by the Middle Passage: 'Mama Afrika', a song they first released during the Keti Koti ('broken chains', slavery abolition) celebrations in 2013 when it moved many to tears.

When I later spoke to Watson, driving force behind both the Black History Festival and Untold Empowerment, he explicitly connected African cultural heritage to black Dutch citizenship. Explaining the social urgency of the projects, he said:

> As black citizens, we are part of the Dutch nation and its colonial history. But this history, *our* history, and *our* cultural heritage, has been erased from the official canons, it is not common knowledge. This is why we are still seen as foreigners – 'non-western allochthones' – and why a lot of our youth struggle with low self-esteem.

With his long-term record as a youth worker in Amsterdam Southeast, Watson has developed a deep insight into the detrimental impact of racial discrimination on black youth and is driven to improve their self-image and fuel their social progress and successful participation in Dutch society. He is convinced that knowledge of the Dutch history of slave trade and colonialism – 'knowing where you are coming from' – and of the 'rich African culture from which you are descending' is crucial to this end. As happened during the festival, transmitting this knowledge often involves teaching, if not persuading, people that they have an 'African background' in the first place. On other occasions too, I observed how such persuasion often included references to a person's skin colour, curly hair or body shape, but also resistance to such acts of reading Africanness into bodily features.

Key to Untold Empowerment's approach, then, is that next to African dance classes, theatre techniques and performance opportunities, it also offers workshops

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about black history and social issues confronting black youth. African heritage thus comes to be directly associated with a historical and political understanding of blackness grounded in the foundational moment of the Middle Passage. Recuperating a preslavery African heritage as a source of empowerment and self-realisation is a way of undoing the legacy of the colonial co-production of 'African' and/as 'black' as inferior to 'white' (Mbembe 2017). Heritage as a metacultural framework of value serves here to mark 'culture', as linked to particular bodies, as valuable in a context in which the opposite often happens, or has been happening for a very long time.

Importantly also, presenting black history as *Dutch* history, Watson's projects make African performing arts a medium of telling and embodying 'the untold story' of African-descended people in the Netherlands to redress hegemonic narratives of national belonging. As discussed above, dominant views – and recurrent treatment – of black people as a certain kind of foreigners who belong elsewhere, build on a long European history of racial othering. The opposition between black and white thus produced became central to a European self-image as essentially but unspeakably white. Like the term Afro-Dutch, projects such as those discussed here question that whiteness by performing African heritage as blackness *and* as part of Dutch history. Thus making functional and significant a distinction between black and white as relevant social categories, they express a struggle for 'black citizenship': for full and unconditional recognition of national belonging in a context in which this is yet to be attained for persons of colour.

Ghanaian-Dutch youth, also a large community in Amsterdam Southeast, share this experience of racial othering and exclusion, but in general the Black History Festival and the Untold performances have little of their interest. The 'African heritage' mobilised to link Afro-Caribbean youth to Africa seems to serve less easily to connect them with their Ghanaian peers. I asked Watson why so few youth of Ghanaian descent, despite their rising interest in 'African heritage', participate in these projects. One of the reasons he gave was that in Amsterdam Southeast Surinamese are dominant, especially in politics and activism, and 'Ghanaians don't really participate in the black struggle.'[7] Conversely, some Ghanaian-Dutch I spoke to felt that Surinamese strongly positioned themselves as Dutch citizens, entitled to the country on historical, colonial grounds, and Africans as (unwanted) immigrants, who essentially belong elsewhere (in Africa). Cross-cutting the notion of (and struggle for) black citizenship, then, is a distinction made between (Afro-Caribbean) postcolonial belonging and (African) postmigrant (non-)belonging. This intersection complicates the primacy of the dominant-whiteness versus subaltern-blackness opposition and the singularity of notions like black citizenship and 'the black struggle'. To flesh this out, I now turn to Ghanaian practices of citizenship, blackness and African heritage-making in the Netherlands.

Uniting the global 'citizens of Alkebulan'

In contrast to (post)colonial migrants, who travelled to the Netherlands holding Dutch passports, most Ghanaian migrants have been more concerned with acquiring

[7] Another reason is that many Ghanaians are committed Christians and are put off by Untold's interest in winti. This raises the question, to be addressed elsewhere, of how religion, including also Islam, plays into the racial formations emerging here.

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citizenship than with social recognition of citizenship already obtained. A Dutch passport makes life and work in the Netherlands easier and more efficient and is thus an important tool for realising their goals. Whether they have this passport or not, many first-generation Ghanaians perceive of themselves as 'strangers in somebody's land' (*ohohuo* in Twi), as travellers (*okwantuni*), a temporary experience often commented on in popular songs and radio discussions. Being seen as strangers despite Dutch citizenship is not the problem; they struggle with different issues, including the difficulty of obtaining papers or legalising diplomas, and the barrier the Dutch language poses. Formal citizenship, then, is not so much a social issue of national belonging, but more a practical one of access to the rights and benefits that come with being a member of the Dutch nation. Very important among these is access to unrestricted international travel, including the possibility to go 'home' and come back. Dutch citizenship thus enables transnational living (cf. Mazzucato 2008), and the latter is more important.

Although many Ghanaians I have spoken to acknowledge that in Europe they are categorised as 'black', many express reservations about this term and prefer to think of themselves as Africans. In the Dutch context, and particularly in Amsterdam Southeast, 'black' is a social category already occupied by dominant others (Afro-Caribbeans). 'To Ghanaians,' one Ghanaian-Dutch young woman said referring to her parents' generation, 'there is very little difference between white Europeans and black Europeans.' A distinction between 'European' or 'Western' (including 'black' and 'white') and 'African' can trump that between 'white' and 'black'. A Ghanaian mother in her fifties was quite explicit about the difference between 'blacks' and 'Africans':

> Blacks don't know where they are coming from – it is sad – so they have all these identity issues. They don't know who they are, where they belong. Africans know where they are coming from, and then I am not talking about 'I am from Ghana', 'I am from Nigeria', no, and I am not even talking about which tribe, no. Africans know their village, their hometown. If you don't know your village, you are not an African.

Indeed, a Ghanaian-Dutch student of mine recounted how, when she visited Ghana and her accent gave her away as foreign-born, the question 'where are you from?' (*wofiri hen?*) served as a litmus test for her true Ghanaianness (easily generalised as Africanness). Her mentioning of her mother's hometown proved both her culturally correct interpretation of the question (not place of birth or residence, but of ancestry), her connection to a concrete place in Ghana and her knowledge of the Asante principle of matrilineal descent. In contrast to Watson's reading of Africanness from 'anatomical features', Ghanaians (in Ghana and abroad) locate being African in physical appearance only if connected to cultural knowledge and a known genealogical link to a 'hometown'. Most Ghanaian parents abroad try to raise their children with such knowledge and a strong awareness of being African. Like in the opening vignette, this includes specific ethnic (e.g. Asante, Ewe) identifications and heritages. A 'black consciousness' is not necessarily part of it.

This is changing with the second generation. Just like their Afro-Caribbean peers, Ghanaian-Dutch youths live in a white-dominated society in which racial discrimination is a fact of life they have had to deal with since primary school. Especially for those growing up in white environments, blackness is a reality as material as the inquisitive fingers of white school mates touching their hair and remarks about the colour of their

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skin or the shape of their nose. As a result, many Ghanaian-Dutch have inadvertently come to see themselves as black, and are increasingly coming to identify with black social struggles, both in the Netherlands and elsewhere. The new wave of black emancipation and anti-racism in the Netherlands, including the movement against the racial caricature of Black Pete, stimulates an emerging black consciousness among them. And so do transnationally networked movements for racial justice, such as Black Lives Matter. More than their parents, they are becoming black.

When it comes to 'African heritage', however, many Ghanaian-Dutch have reservations about the incorporation of Africanness in a dominant, transatlantic narrative of blackness, which grounds African heritage in the history of slavery. Even if they show increasing interest in this history, their own African heritage projects address different issues and invoke different, if connected histories. One example is the multimedia project Citizens of Alkebulan, initiated by two young Ghanaian-Dutch women and dedicated to 'changing the perception of Africa and its citizens'. Creating an international network of 'African creatives' in music, art, fashion and culture, the aim is to showcase 'the beauty, diversity and riches of Africa's cultural heritage'. They do this through a series of cultural events, including an annual festival, a music album and a book series with personal stories, collected from within their own networks of family and friends, about 'African cultures and creatives'. The project name is a direct resistance against being defined on European terms: Alkebulan, according to founder Rudy, is 'the name of Africa before it was called Africa by the Europeans'.[8] As 'one of the oldest names given by our ancestors for the continent that we now know as Africa, the name Alkebulan symbolizes going back to our roots', to the era before the European trade. Significantly, Alkebulan explicitly includes North Africa, and people of North African descent, in its project so as to disrupt the common, racialised distinction between 'Black Africans' and 'North Africans'. This, 'Alkebulians' say, is a European invention based on a mistaken and misleading notion of race that disregards centuries of trans-Saharan connection, exchange and mixture. Among the team members are two Moroccan-Dutch, a Somali-Dutch and several other Ghanaian-Dutch artists and creatives. United as Citizens of Alkebulan, they mobilise African cultural creativity to challenge common stereotypes about Africa and Africans – stereotypes that have a great impact on second-generation African youth growing up in Europe, like themselves.

'We all have our stories of shame', Rudy said. These stories, recurrent also in our conversations with young Africans who grew up in the Netherlands, had much to do with the dominant image of Africa in the mainstream media and the public imagination. Many told of their confusion, shame or anger at being associated, in interactions with non-Africans, with a continent reduced to poverty, hunger, war and disease, and with a people recurrently portrayed in the media as pitiful and in need of Western saving (cf. Weiner 2016). This trope has a long genealogy in the European 'invention' and 'blackening' of Africa as Europe's quintessential Other, of Africans as essentially different from and ultimately inferior to Europeans (Mudimbe 1994; Mbembe 2017). Colonial portrayals of Africa as a 'dark continent' and its inhabitants as savage, barbaric, primitive or child-like, resurface today in the media and popular culture, and in ignorant questions and 'jokes' from non-African peers and schoolteachers. In

[8] Alkebulan is supposedly an 'indigenous', Arabic name meaning 'land of the Blacks', but the origins of the toponym are highly disputed.

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addition, Ghanaian kids growing up in Amsterdam Southeast encountered a specific form of everyday racism in the name that Surinamese kids used to call them: *bokoe*, a Surinamese slur for African. Literally meaning stinking fish, it carries a complex of colonially rooted racist stereotypes of savagery and backwardness, and smelly, dirty and ugly bodies (De Witte 2019). Prevalent among 'white' and 'black' Dutch alike, then, derogatory, stereotypical misrepresentations of Africa and Africans as Europe's fundamental opposite cross-cut racial categories and deeply impact the lives of young people developing identities as European *and* African *and* black.

Born from such experiences, the Alkebulan project aims, like the Black History Festival, at 'empowerment': to provide new generations of African youngsters in the Netherlands with empowering, cool African role models. 'We didn't have enough examples', Rudy explained in an interview with my research assistant Gladys. 'There was Nelson Mandela of course, but he was old; talking about young examples, like Fuse ODG [a popular Ghanaian-British music star] and so on now, we didn't have that, so who could you identify with?' In addition, history books in school taught about Africa only in the one chapter about slavery, leaving African pupils with little to be proud of. 'There have been so many powerful, smart, creative people in Africa before that time, and after, people doing great and cool stuff, but we never hear about them.' Calling up the talent for creativity as an African cultural heritage, Alkebulan events (and other productions) bring together a wide variety of artists, writers, fashion designers, photographers and other creatives with roots in Ghana, Morocco, Somalia, and many other African countries, as well as people of Afro-Caribbean backgrounds. This Pan-African unity-in-diversity approach was unmistakable at the first Alkebulan festival on 10 July 2016. Featuring a range of music, dance and spoken-word performances, panel debates, food, fashion and visual styling referencing places and peoples all over the continent, the festival was all geared towards 'taking delight in a self-confident Africa that will not settle for being just a charity case'.

In its emphasis on cool creative production that speaks to a young generation, the Alkebulan project is part of a broader, recently emerging movement of African self-identification and pride among young second-generation African postmigrants that thrives on the global circulation and popularity of contemporary urban African pop culture (De Witte 2019). Although I have not heard Alkebulians speak about this transnational movement in terms of Afropolitanism (a term they may well be critical of),[9] their proclaimed aim of presenting a 'voice for the modernized, wandering, global citizen who each conveys a mishmash of cultural inputs and influences from Africa' clearly resonates with the term 'Afropolitans' as coined by Ghanaian-Nigerian writer Taiye Selasi for the new generation of 'young Africans working and living in cities around the globe, belonging to no single geography, but feeling at home in many' (Tuakli-Wosornu 2005). Citizens of the world, privileged with European or American passports, who are proudly African and have a living connection with a tangible place in Africa, and refuse to be defined by the colour of their skin, or by the singularity of one particular nation. Although Afropolitanism has been criticised for its elitism, embrace of consumerism, and lack of political engagement and historical consciousness, its critical potential in contesting ascribed identities is worth stressing (see also Eze 2014) and resonates in the Alkebulan project. Disrupting commonplace

[9] Indeed, Rudy objected to the Afro-prefix in 'Afro-Dutch', because it usually means 'black' and excludes North Africans.

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essentialisms of race and territory, and the caging singularity of dominant identity categories, Afropolitan critiques posit cultural hybridity, and multiplicity of being and belonging. As Rudy told Gladys:

> What we really feel with Alkebulan is that we create a world where it is okay to be both, because … When I go to Ghana, people see me as Western, but here they call me *allochtoon*. So where do I belong? Alkebulan is that world where you can simply be yourself, be both, and also return to your roots. Be a combination of both. Of course I am also Western, it's a combination. That's what Alkebulan stands for, and all citizens have that in a way.

Alkebulan's project of world-making, then, is to carve out a space for this plurality of belonging that comes with the postmigrant reality of living multiple cultural affinities. Such a fundamental openness to otherness, the ability to incorporate affiliations with people of diverse ethnic, cultural and racial backgrounds as part of selfhood, has a much longer history, both in Caribbean societies (Badiane 2012; Landvreugd 2016) and in many African societies (Mbembe 2007; Nyamnjoh 2017). In a European society in which dominant identity models persistently – and ever more forcefully – produce being and belonging in singular, exclusionary or oppositional terms,[10] however, it has a distinctly innovative character, challenging any rigid binary construction of the world and the people in it.

Conclusion: Afro-Dutch dialogues on race, identity and belonging

In this article I have set out to explore the relationship between race, identity and belonging as it appears in projects of 'African heritage' by and for young Dutch people of Afro-Caribbean and African descent. The complexity of the politics of belonging, connection and heritage that we see transpiring from the examples I have presented escapes a dyadic analytical framework of 'white majority' versus 'black minority' populations. I have thus argued for opening up simplistic black-and-white schemes and situated questions of race, identity and belonging in the Netherlands in the relationships between the persistent 'whiteness' of Dutch nationhood, the country's postcolonial Afro-Caribbean population and its more recent African (post)migrant population.

The 'African heritage' projects I have discussed speak to experiences situated in personal biographies, families, neighbourhoods and schools. These experiences also emerge out of histories of slavery, imperialism, colonialism, postcolonialism and migration – multiple histories that have tremendously complicated the meaning of being 'African' and being 'black' and the relationship between the two. Each in their own way, our research participants addressed the contemporary repercussions of the historical processes through which the categories of 'black' and 'African' were co-produced through each other as a continent and its people were made black. This detrimental co-production has been internalised as well as resisted, disrupted as well as reproduced, on various sides of the black Atlantic. What concerns us here are the traces it has left in the

[10] This tendency is visible not only in the ossification of oppositional 'black' and 'white' categories, but also in the recent, US-inspired pitting of 'non-black people of colour' against 'black people'.

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Netherlands today – in everyday racisms, in stereotypes about Africa, in the reproduction of white Dutch normativity – and the ways in which the porous boundaries of and mutable relations between 'Africanness', 'blackness' and 'Dutchness' are re-negotiated in the grassroots efforts of different subaltern communities. In these efforts we can discern at least two different critiques of the racialised exclusivity of Dutchness. First, the Black History Festival and the Untold Empowerment project express struggles for 'Black citizenship' that seek recognition of African heritage as part of Dutch (colonial) history and, drawing on a global framework of blackness as a source of collective identification and empowerment, serve to inscribe blackness into Dutch nationhood. Second, Alkebulan's celebration of African cultural creativity contests the marginalisation of Africa and Africans in dominant Eurocentric narratives. Its Afropolitan critique not only questions the primacy of Dutch national belonging. By including North Africans it also resists hegemonic formulations of Africanness as black that tend to reproduce, if unintentionally, Eurocentric classifications.

Amidst the multiplicity of cross-cutting notions of difference and belonging enacted in these projects, race appears as a negotiated object that is fundamentally relational, malleable and circulating. Race is variably ascribed to bodily features, history, territory, cultural style and any particular combinations of these. The circulation of such different components of race, and the various ways in which they are assembled in different social locations, asks for 'closer attention to what circulates, who consumes, how communities are affected, and how political solidarities are forged and broken' (Thomas 2007: 123). In short, the dynamics of race in the ethnography I have presented calls for an anthropology of race in Europe that attends to the production and circulation of categories of difference and belonging on several spatial levels: (1) the multiple global trajectories of 'blackness' and 'Africanness' and the ways in which they intersect but also diverge; (2) intensified racism *and* growing black emancipation on national and European levels; and (3) shifting hierarchies of ethnicity on local, neighbourhood levels. Particularly important in engaging with an emerging Afro-Europe is to take into account the experiences of second-generation African Europeans and their navigating the complex dynamics of partly overlapping, partly distinct Afro-Caribbean and African diaspora. This will not only help avoid the problematic conflation of black and African in conceptualising the African diaspora. More importantly for our purpose here, it can sensitise to the ways in which racial hierarchies might intersect with other axes of difference and inequality, including citizenship status, (post)colonial belonging, migration trajectory and geographic origin.

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Citoyenneté noire, critiques afropolites: constitution vernaculaire d'un patrimoine et les négociations de la race aux Pays-Bas

Cet article offre une nouvelle perspective sur la relation entre le terrain contesté de la race et la politique du patrimoine ainsi que l'appartenance à l'Europe postcoloniale. En présentant de la recherche dans les Pays-Bas, je soutiens qu'au lieu de reproduire le cadre dyadique majorité blanche–minorité noire, nous devons situer la négociation de la race dans une relation triangulaire entre la «blancheur» persistante de la nationalité néerlandaise, la population postcolonial afro-caribéen du pays, et sa population plus récente de post-migration africaine. En discutant des projets «d'héritage africain» créé par de jeunes Néerlandais d'ascendance afro-antillaise et ghanéenne, je discerne deux critiques différentes de l'exclusivité racialisée de l'identité néerlandaise. Les luttes pour la «citoyenneté noire» cherchent à faire reconnaître l'héritage africain en

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tant que partie intégrante de l'histoire coloniale néerlandaise et cherchent à inscrire l'identité black dans la nationalité néerlandaise; les célébrations «afropolites» de «l'être africain dans le monde» remettent en question non seulement la primauté de l'appartenance nationale des Pays-Bas, mais également la résistance aux formulations hégémoniques de cette identité noire. Dans ce «trilogue», la race se fait et se défait au croisement d'autres axes de différence et d'inégalité, notamment le statut de citoyenneté, la trajectoire de la migration et l'origine africaine. Le cadre triadique que le document avance traduit non seulement la complexité de la dynamique raciale dans la constitution d'un patrimoine, mais sensibilise également à des conceptions alternatives de l'appartenance et à d'autres sources de critique.

Mots-clés race, fabrication d'héritage, diaspora africaine, Europe postcoloniale, citoyenneté noire

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