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Adapting European heritage: Bernardine Evaristo's *Soul Tourists* (2005) and Omar Victor Diop's *Project Diaspora* (2014)

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ABSTRACT

This article considers how the novel *Soul Tourists* (2005) by the British writer Bernardine Evaristo and the series *Project Diaspora: a Journey through Time* (2014) by the Senegalese photographer Omar Victor Diop critically intervene in and contribute to ongoing conversations about how 'Europe' is conceptualized. By adapting historical narratives and by playing with genre conventions, Evaristo and Diop shed light on historical perspectives and interpretations of Europe that have remained obscured. Most important with regard to the European public sphere, *Soul Tourists* and *Project Diaspora* adapt the category of 'European heritage'. Artistically re-narrating the stories of Black people in Europe, Evaristo and Diop establish geographical and historical dialogues between Europe, Africa and the African Diaspora that re-write European heritage and that deconstruct the prevailing narrative of Europe as White. While their works could be said to 'Africanize' the categories of 'European heritage' and 'Europe', 'Afro(euro)pean heritage' and 'Afroeurope' are not the end-goal. Rather, by adapting categories that many Europeans continue to conceive as universals, Evaristo and Diop reveal received understandings of these categories as racialized particulars.

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Can I please just be European?
Nnenna Belia 2023

Introduction

To consider 'Europe' as a discursive construct, as has become common practice in the humanities and social sciences, calls for an investigation into how 'Europe' continues to work as 'a silent referent in historical knowledge' (Chakrabarty 2000, 27–28).¹ Accordingly, scholars have scrutinized how Europe has persistently been understood as the birthplace of modernity, as synonymous to progress and civilization, and as White (Amin 2004; Bhabra 2009, 2022). It is this understanding of Europe with which I, a White Dutch woman born in the late 1970s, was (often implicitly) brought up. It is this understanding of Europe, also, that, even if questioned intellectually in the context in which I live and work,

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still dominates the Dutch and European public spheres of which I and my university are part.

Heritage plays a significant role in perpetuating essentialist and racist understandings of Europe. Heritage, after all, is not simply a narrative about the past but also about 'who we want to be – as individuals, groups and nations' in the present (Niklasson 2023, 3). Thus, heritage directly connects to identity and citizenship, in regional, national and transnational contexts. The relation between heritage and conceptualizations of 'Europe' has been widely discussed (Delanty 2017; Harrison, Dias, and Kristiansen 2023; Macdonald 2013), also through the lens of postcolonial studies (Buettner 2021; Van der Waal, Van Weyenberg, and Volk 2022; Van Weyenberg 2019). There is increasing interest in how 'European heritage' – which I put between quotation marks to emphasize that, like 'Europe', I approach this notion as a discursive construct – can be used to demarcate which European citizens are seen as European and which are seen as 'in but not of Europe' (C.L.R James, quoted in Hall 1999, 10).

Because heritage is per definition 'affective and selective' (Niklasson 2023, 3), it is easily put to the service of 'cultural fundamentalism' (Stolcke 1995). There are, of course, also critical understandings of heritage that actively call for diversity and inclusivity, and the field of Critical Heritage Studies has made important contributions to this. However, as Niklasson observes, in the public sphere heritage is still 'in many ways, part of modernity's grammar of belonging', functioning as 'a membership organization with set criteria', whereby 'the question "where do you come from?" [...] inevitably carries the meaning "where do you rightfully belong?"' (2023, 5). Ideas of European heritage – and I find the word 'ideas' important, as it emphasizes that understandings of heritage are ideologically driven – therefore function as "a 'bordering practice,' an 'active process of creating, sustaining and challenging cultural border imaginaries' (Turunen 2023).

Here, I am interested in the potential of art to challenge such cultural border imaginaries and to critically intervene in and contribute to ongoing conversations about 'European heritage' and about 'Europe' (Mitchell 1992). I depart, then, from the belief that art plays an important role vis-à-vis the ideas that circulate within the European public sphere. I use Triandafyllidou, Wodak, and Krzyanowski's definition of the European public sphere as 'a transnational arena of communication where social, political, institutional, cultural and economic actors voice their opinions and ideas which are then discussed, distributed and negotiated with reference to different (crucial) events' (2009, 4). In what follows, I consider the novel *Evaristo* (2005) by the British writer Bernardine Evaristo and the series *Project Diaspora: A Journey through Time* (Diop 2014) by the Senegalese photographer Omar Victor Diop as two cultural actors that make the workings of 'Europe' as a silent referent, to refer back to Chakrabarty, explicit and that shed light on historical perspectives on and interpretations of Europeanness and European belonging that have remained obscured. Both Evaristo (London, 1959) and Diop (Dakar, 1980) are well-known artists whose works circulate widely in and beyond Europe. The first Black woman to win the Booker Prize in 2019, Evaristo frequently appears in the British media.² Her writing is translated into over forty languages and is regularly featured at international book festivals.³ Diop, too, is internationally renowned, with publications in magazines such as *Harper's Bazaar* and *Spanish Vogue* and commissioned work for African and European fashion

designers and brands.⁴ His work is included in various art collections and *Project Diaspora* was exhibited across the world, for example in London (2018), Kyoto (2020) and Turku (2022).⁵

In what follows, I draw on existing scholarship on Evaristo's *Soul Tourists* (Cattani 2017; Hauthal 2017; McLeod 2011; Moji 2019; Velickovic 2012) and on Diop's *Project Diaspora* (Buggenhagen 2017; Khoury 2017). Different from these approaches, I consider both artworks specifically as adaptations, defined by Linda Hutcheon as 'a derivation that is not derivative – a work that is second without being secondary' (2006, 8, 9).⁶ I choose this approach not to suggest that these works can only be understood with reference to a source on which they draw, but to demonstrate that specifically as adaptations they contribute to discussions about how 'Europe' is conceptualized. In Evaristo and Diop, adaptation takes place on different levels: their works adapt historical narratives (Evaristo) and historical paintings (Diop), but also play with genre conventions, the literary genre of travel writing in the case of Evaristo (see also Hauthal 2017) and the visual genre of self-portraiture in the case of Diop. Most important with regard to the European public sphere, *Soul Tourists* and *Project Diaspora* adapt a category that many European citizens and politicians, whether out of nostalgia or electoral reasons, are eager to conceive as fixed: 'European heritage'.

By imaginatively revising received understandings of European heritage, Evaristo and Diop highlight what in traditional heritage narratives has remained marginalized or obscured and establish geographical and historical dialogues between Europe and Africa that actively challenge the myth of 'racial Europeanization' that 'presumes Europe to be white and Christian' (Goldberg 2006, 352). Blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction, Evaristo and Diop present another Europe than the purist, static and essentialised version perpetuated by this racist myth. In their works, 'Europe' becomes 'an active site of multiple – and often times contradictory – productions and transformations' (Biebuyck and Rumford 2012, 5). Re-imagining European heritage from a Black perspective, Evaristo and Diop decolonize dominant heritage narratives while also signalling Africa's and Europe's long history of connection and interaction (Hansen and Jonsson 2014; Garrido et al. 2019).

Evaristo and Diop call attention to 'Black Europe' (Hine, Keaton, and Small 2009; Kelly and Vassell 2013) and to 'African Europeans' (Otele 2020). It could be argued that their works are 'Afro-European' (Dominic 2014; McLeod 2011) or 'Afropean' (Pitts 2019), terms that each have their own 'implications, applications, epistemological positions, and histories of emergence' (Garrido et al. 2019, 2). The potential of such terms is perhaps best expressed in the words of the photographer and writer Johnny Pitts, for whom 'Afro-Europe' suggests 'a space where blackness [takes] part in shaping European identity at large' and 'the possibility of living in and with more than one idea: Africa and Europe, or, by extension, the Global South and the West, without being mixed-this, half-that or black-other' (2019, 1). Pitts relates how 'Afro-Europe' encourages him to think of himself as 'whole and unhyphenated' (1). In what follows, I am not specifically interested in how Evaristo's *Soul Tourists* and Diop's *Project Diaspora* could or should be labelled, although I do return to the question of labelling and categorizing in my conclusion. Mostly, I am interested in how, through the process of adaptation, these works highlight what in discussions about European heritage and identity has remained invisible, or, perhaps more accurately, make

invisibility visible, or perhaps more accurately still: call attention to the politics of visibility.

Cross-temporal travel in Evaristo's *Soul Tourists*

In an essay, Evaristo dissects her experience on the *Literature Express Europa 2000*, where she was repeatedly challenged about whether she was an 'authentic British voice,' an experience that made her reflect on 'the historical black presence in Europe' (2008, 2–3). Much of Evaristo's oeuvre is concerned with exactly this: the entanglement of Africa and Europe. Her verse-novel *The Emperor's Babe* (2001) rewrites the history of Roman London from a Black perspective, and her satirical novel *Blonde Roots* (2008) presents an alternative history of the transatlantic slave trade, this time with Africans enslaving Europeans. *Soul Tourists* (2005) similarly reflects on the entangled histories of Africa and Europe. It sprang from Evaristo's frustration with 'the absences which invalidate the black history of the world's Great White Continent' (2008, 3).

*Soul Tourists*⁷ is set in the late eighties and features Stanley, of Jamaican descent, who meets the ten-year older Jessie, of British and Ghanaian descent. Jessie convinces Stanley to join her on a trip across Europe. Her goal is to get to Australia, to find her estranged son (in which she does not succeed). For Stanley, however, crossing the continent becomes a way of investigating who he is and where he belongs. The couple's 'grand tour' of Europe recalls, Hauthal also observes (2017, 45), the historical grand tour in early modern Europe, which allowed White upper-class men to discover Europe's classical and Renaissance cultural heritage. Differently, Evaristo's travellers are two Black Britons, and the heritage they encounter is broader and more diverse. As a road-novel, *Soul Tourists* also references the genre of travel writing, a genre which, Mary Louise Pratt famously discusses (Pratt 1992), is intricately related to colonialism. As Pratt argues, European travel writing about non-European parts of the world 'made imperial expansion meaningful and desirable to the citizenries of the imperial countries' (3). Some critics therefore view travel writing as forever tied to its colonial heritage, while for others it 'has the potential to embrace revisionist, critical, and subversive narratives, political positions, and innovative modes of representation' (Edwards 2018, 19). Janine Hauthal approaches *Soul Tourists* as such a revisionist interpretation that rewrites a traditionally White genre from an Afro-European perspective (2017, 38–39).⁸

Perhaps resulting from his obsession with history or, as is suggested, from his inherited ability to communicate with ghosts, on his travels Stanley encounters nine historical Black and mixed-race personages, from different periods in European history. He meets Lucy Negro, for example, who may have been the inspiration for the 'Dark Lady' in Shakespeare's sonnets, and Joseph Boulogne, a famous conductor and composer in 18th-century France. Stanley also meets the famous Russian author Alexander Pushkin, great-grandson to Ibrahim Gannibal (probably from Cameroon), who was enslaved as a child by the Ottomans and given to Peter the Great, who freed and raised him (Lounsbury 2000, 105). The canon of Western cultural heritage is extensively referenced, but from perspectives that are traditionally disregarded. These perspectives point to the contributions of Black people to European culture and not only adapt the canon of European heritage, but also challenge the racialized notion of Europe that draws on this canon for its legitimization.

The novel's 'hauntological imaginary' as Moji describes it, makes Europe's history of race and racism visible (2019, 19). Stanley's 'discovery of spiritual African and Afrodiasporic kinship' becomes key to shaping his subjectivity (Moji 2019, 21). The various historical personages help him to confront his sense of not belonging, a feeling echoed in the experiences of his father, who passes away at the start of the novel never having felt at home in the UK: 'We doan belong in a this country . . . we doan belong, Stanley' (19). As the novel progresses, Stanley is led to recollect that '[his] people came from a straggly, disgruntled queue/of slaves, masters and indentured servants,/of whom [he] was never allowed to speak,' bringing a family history to the surface that his father taught him to suppress: '*Doan go raking up the past Stanley*' (122).

Stanley's journey resembles Evaristo's own experience while travelling through Europe in her twenties: 'Criss-crossing the continent by car was somehow akin to claiming it. Travelling over thousands of miles of European roads demystified and familiarized it' (2008, 5). Stanley goes through a similar process of claiming his identity as a European:

Was he, Stanley, really an outsider? Maybe you didn't have to blend in or be accepted to belong. You belonged because you made the decision to and if you truly believed it no one could knock it out of you. These visitations came from inside the body of history, turning its skin inside out and writing a new history upon it with a bone shaved down to a quill dripped in the ink of blood. Europe was not as it seemed, Stanley decided, and for him, at least, Europe would never be the same. (189)

Stanley, it becomes clear, can only feel at home in Europe if the narrative of Europe he was brought up with is adapted. But the violent imagery of a 'bone shaved down to a quill dripped in the ink of blood' conveys that this is a painful process. It is a frustrating process as well: when Stanley learns about the Moorish rule of Andalusia this makes him want to 'storm up to his history teacher, grab him by the lapels and demand, "Why didn't you tell me about the Moors, Mr Cartwright? Why not, eh, why not?"' (155). His encounters with historical Black Europeans help Stanley to challenge the racialized notion of Europe he was taught: 'Did you know,' he asks Jessie, 'there were black people in sixteenth-century England and eighteenth-century France, par example? Who knows what's in the genes of your average Frenchman or Briton today?' (132). Stanley thus 'questions the homogenizing fiction Europe has been telling itself' (Cattani 2017, 263).

Different from Stanley, Jessie has no interest in chasing her African roots or exploring her diasporic identity. 'You're just another Englishman,' she tells Stanley, 'don't kid yourself. You think like an Englishman, walk like an Englishman, talk like an Englishman, eat like an Englishman and most likely dance like an Englishman. You have spent all your life in England, Stanley, so what does that make you? Mongolian? Peruvian? Egyptian?' (51). Jessie identifies as a Yorkshire woman, but she also relates (in verse) how at the Turkish border her British identity is questioned because of the colour of her skin:

That customs officer fingered my black
United Kingdom passport at length,
glancing up to compare information to person,
as if he couldn't quite believe . . . something. (196)

The use of enjambment at the end of the first line puts emphasis on 'black', pointing to the role of Jessie's colour in the situation described. As in Stanley's earlier reflection, the language is violent, this time also suggestive of sexual assault. The experience reminds Jessie of an earlier incident at Dover when she was 'strip-searched', her 'clothes and her holes', and when she, a 'law-abiding Englishwoman' was "prohibited from entering her 'own country' (197). The racism Jessie experiences demonstrates how, as Fatima El-Tayeb identifies, the children and grandchildren of migrants are often perceived as 'at least as "un-European" as their ancestors' (2008, 660). This structural racism gives context to Jessie's loud proclamation of her Yorkshire identity, an identity questioned by others, and also explains why Stanley fears driving across Europe: 'It's not safe for us out there [...]. Fascist thugs all over Europe' (51).

Stanley's and Jessie's precarious position is echoed in the experiences of Lucy Negro, who relays to Shakespeare (in Shakespearian-style verse): "'Tis not safe for my kinde here any more./Her Majestie will have all blackamoores banished./I will be as a fox with no place to hide. Damned/by the colour of my skin, hounded" (65). Queen Charlotte, too, remembers how on her arrival in England 'comments were passed on my swarthy complexion, the indelicate spreading of my nostrils and too-wide mouth, the frizz of my fair hair' and how her personal physician Baron Stockmar describes her as having a "'true mulatto face'" (287). This citation is historical: in his memoirs Stockmar indeed derogatorily describes Charlotte as 'small and crooked, with a real Mulatto face' (2011). Stanley's ability to speak with the ghosts of the pasts, *Soul Tourists* suggests, allows Lucy and Charlotte to address the racial politics of their time.

In Evaristo, past and present speak to each other, showing that adaptation is an 'ongoing and mutual process, rather than a unidirectional line of influence' (Van Weyenberg 2013, xxii). And so, '[a]s [Stanley] explored the past, he became aware that the past was exploring him too, in its own spooky way' (155). The ghosts of the past *need* to inhabit the present, *Soul Tourists* suggests, to revisit their life stories, to rethink their identities and to retrospectively reclaim their positions in Europe's historical narrative. 'This is just what I need,' Queen Charlotte says about Stanley, 'A young man, some passion and a sympathetic pair of ears' (288). While canonical figures such as Shakespeare or George III conventionally take up central places in Europe's cultural heritage, through playful anachronisms Evaristo casts a light on stories and experiences that have remained obscured. In this way, *Soul Tourists* upsets the dominant cultural heritage narrative of Europe as 'White'.

Arguably, Evaristo's narrative points to what Fatima El-Tayeb describes as a 'postnational Europeanization', which holds the promise of including those who have been excluded in the nation-state (El-Tayeb 2008, 666). Indeed, not feeling at home in the UK, it is continental Europe to which Stanley and Jessie turn. The ghosts Stanley encounters help him to piece together a European narrative that includes Black perspectives, demonstrating the potential for a transnational European narrative that includes the minorities that national narratives exclude (El-Tayeb 2008, 666). El-Tayeb observes, however, that 'the internalist focus of national histories', which obscures the role of minorities and migrants, seems to be 'reinscribed' in European discourses (666). *Soul Tourists* is directed against this repetition of exclusion, communicating that '[o]nly a European public that incorporates these voices, as well as its own repressed history, might indeed become postnational' (El-Tayeb 2008, 666).

It is not easy for Stanley and Jessie to make Europe their home; it requires them to revisit their own lives, but it also requires a retelling – an adaptation – of Europe. Despite the optimistic tone of the novel, Stanley's and Jessie's road-trip is by no means a progressive narrative of self-formation. The novel's closing, Hauthal argues, does not offer 'easy solutions' and indicates 'a diasporic condition that does not end with finding one's identity, but that requires continuous connection and reshaping of the self alongside plural imaginary affiliations' (2017, 53). At the end of the narrative, Stanley has reached Kuwait, from where he looks back at 'the vacillating topography of Europe' (281–282). He realizes that he 'cannot return home. Perhaps not ever', but also adds: 'And this is what I want' (282). Stanley's encounters with the ghosts from the past have given him a history to his story, a history that ties him to Europe differently than before. It is not he, Stanley realizes, who must adapt to belong in Europe; it is Europe that must adapt to him.

Re-enacting the past in Omar Victor Diop's *Project Diaspora*

Playful anachronisms not only mark *Soul Tourists* but also characterize the series *Project Diaspora: a Journey through Time* (Diop 2014) by the Senegalese photographer Omar Victor Diop. In eighteen self-portraits Diop re-enacts existing portraits of notable Africans in European history, such as Velázquez' portrait of his slave and studio assistant Juan de Pareja (1650) or Jeronimus Becx' painting of the emissary of Kongo Don Miguel de Castro (1643). *Project Diaspora* was created during a residency in Malaga in 2014, where Diop discovered the book series 'The Image of the Black in Western Art', about the representation of people of African descent in Western art. In an interview Diop explains that he wants to 'bring these rich historical characters into the current conversation about the African diaspora and contemporary issues around immigration, integration and acceptance' (O'Hagan 2015). *Project Diaspora* highlights the presence of Africans in European history and the entanglement of two continents that have dominantly been conceived as each other's opposites.

Where Evaristo adapts the genre of travel literature, Diop revises the genre of the self-portrait. Different from the convention of this genre, Diop explains, in *Project Diaspora* he is 'just an accessory' (quoted in DeDieu 2014). The focus is on the historical personages he inhabits, with Diop's body as the site for these personages to reappear: 'for me it is like a second coming of a body of work that hasn't been seen enough and celebrations of a historical figure who is not celebrated enough, so it is really not about me' (quoted in Buggenhagen 2017, 43). To Diop, making these self-portraits was like 'inviting a spirit into the studio' and 'turning into a medium, allowing these historical figures to continue a discourse that they started during their lifetime' (Buggenhagen 2017, 43; Willis 2016). There are clear resonances, then, with Evaristo's character Stanley, who similarly breathes historical figures back to life.

Let me zoom in on one of Diop's adaptations, entitled 'Jean-Baptiste Belley' (Figure 1), which references a painted portrait of the Saint Dominican and French politician Jean-Baptiste Belley (1746–1805) by Anne-Louis Girodet from 1797 (Figure 2). Diop has expressed his surprise that, although Belley's portrait is on display at Versailles, it is unknown to the Senegalese and to the French (quoted in Buggenhagen 42). Belley was born in 1746 on Goree, off the coast of Senegal, and enslaved and taken to Saint-



Figure 1. Omar Victor Diop, Jean-Baptiste Belley, 2014. Diaspora series © Omar Victor Diop, Courtesy MAGNIN-A Gallery, Paris.

Domingue (now Haiti), where he ultimately won his freedom ‘through hard work and sweat’ (Belley, quoted in Levecq 2020, 81). He joined the French colonial army, fought against the Bourbon regime during the Saint-Domingue revolts, was elected the first Black deputy to the French National Convention for the colony of Saint-Domingue and in this capacity argued in Paris for the abolition of slavery within the French empire (Dubois and Scott 2010; Musto 1993, 60).

That a portrait was painted of Belley means that he was considered an important political figure. Interestingly, the original title referring to the portrait as that of a ‘black man’ was a year later replaced by the title ‘Portrait du C. Belley, ex-représentant des colonies’, with the ‘C’ standing for ‘citoyen’ – ‘citizen’ (Musto 1993, 60). Sylvia Musto suggests that this change in title reflects changing ideas about liberty, equality and citizenship at the time and, together with the tricolour belt around Belley’s waist, highlights his status as a French citizen (1993, 60). That Girodet placed Belley next to the bust of the priest and abolitionist Abbé Guillaume-Thomas Raynal could indeed be interpreted as signalling equality between these two figures and representing the victory of abolition (Weston 1994, 85, 88). This juxtaposition of Belley with Raynal is what Diop’s adaptation most explicitly responds to: in his re-enactment Raynal’s bust is removed from the frame, which also removes the comparison between Belley and Raynal that Girard’s painting does evoke. This comparison was ambiguous, as Girodet not only stresses their equal importance as abolitionists by placing them on the same height, but also evokes oppositions:



Figure 2. Anne louis Girodet, Jean Baptiste Belley, 1797. Château de Versailles. Source: <https://fr.Wikipedia.org/>.

There are comparisons of death against life, white marble against black flesh, the antique through idealized nudity against modern costume of people's representative; there is mother country set against colony, intense thought against meditative reflection, European against West African (Senegalese) physiognomy. (Weston 1994, 97)

According to Weston, this comparison only becomes visible if 18th century physiognomy and taxonomy is taken for granted, but since such theories were increasingly challenged with the French Revolution, she asks whether the painting succeeds to 'dismantle prejudice, making it possible to acknowledge racial differences, but also shared concerns for human rights by the two men represented' (Weston 1994, 97).

Sylvia Musto's reading of Girodet's painting is less optimistic. According to her, 'French civilization is inscribed onto the body of the black deputy' in a way that '[conveys] the message that the essence of that civilization is still lacking', and while Belley is shown as a respected political figure, it is his 'difference and his distance from real political involvement' that are stressed (Musto 1993, 69). This difference is made explicit first of all, Musto argues, through the sensual pose and the sexualized display, with Belley's finger pointing towards his genital area (Musto 1993, 95). Also, by having Belley wear an earring, Girodet followed the convention of how Black people were represented (Musto 1993, 66). According to Musto, then, it is not Belley's equality that is emphasized, but his otherness, with Raynal's bust serving as a reminder of 'the necessity of a period of French tutelage as a precondition for black liberty and rule' (1993, 69).

Together, Weston's and Musto's interpretations of Girodet point to the main question Diop presents in his adaptation: how are Black subjects in historical and contemporary

Europe looked at? The differences between Diop's and Girodet's works are telling. While Girodet's painting initially did not even mention Belley's name, Diop's photographic re-enactment is accompanied by an explanatory text that emphasizes Belley's political functions: 'Jean-Baptiste Belley (1746–1805), Native of Senegal, elected member of the Estates General, the National Convention, and the Council of Five Hundred during the French First Republic.'⁹ Like in Girodet, Diop's Belley gazes upwards and leans to the left. Differently, however, he is captured slightly from below and stands more firmly, which emphasizes his importance. Diop also removes various markers that in Girodet denote Belley's otherness: his Belley wears no earring, does not stand in a sexualized pose, and does not, through the position of the finger, call attention to his crotch. Most significantly, by editing the bust of Raynal out of the re-enactment, Diop does not ask the viewer to compare Belley's position as a Black politician in relation to that of the White Raynal, so that the racial opposition is removed from the picture.

By re-enacting historical portraits in the form of contemporary self-portraits and by representing historical figures while also calling attention to himself, Diop presents viewers with an evocative visual anachronism. This is amplified by the fact that the clothing Diop's Belley wears at first sight seems to reflect the formal dress befitting his position, but on closer inspection reveals a contemporary design that merely plays with historical markers (scarf, collar, belt, feather). Mieke Bal investigates the productivity of such artistic anachronisms, which 'neither collapse past and present, as in an ill-conceived presentism, nor objectify the past and bring it within our grasp, as in a problematic positivist historicism' (2001, 6). She introduces the notion of 'preposterous history' to describe 'a way of "doing history" that carries productive uncertainties and illuminating highlights' (7). By 'quoting' the classicist style of Girodet in such a 'wilfully anachronistic' way (Bal, 5), Diop cross-temporally projects questions about the representation of Black subjects; questions that are asked now but that are also relevant to the 18th century, to problems that mattered then but that have by no means been resolved now, in the 21st century.

Most apparent in Diop's adaptation of Girodet, is the replacement of the bust of Raynal with a football, a contemporary sports reference that relates to Belley's historical narrative. Football, Diop explains, involves 'a very interesting blend of glory, hero-worship and exclusion' that 'reveals where society is in terms of race' (quoted in O'Hagan 2015). To Diop, the ambiguous position of Belley in 18th-century France resonates with that of African football players in contemporary Europe, who are admired as representatives of specific nations when they score a goal but who are also given the message that as immigrants they do not belong to these nations or to Europe. And so, like Girodet, in his re-enactment of Belley Diop includes references to the tricolour flag of France (blue in the football and coat, white in the scarf and belt, red in the belt and in the feathers of the hat), posing the question under which conditions African football-players in France are considered to belong to the nation they professionally represent. The bracelet that here replaces the earring could refer to manilla's, the horse-shoe shaped bracelets that were used as currency in the slave trade (Webster 2005, 255), introducing a different marker of otherness and perhaps also commenting on the neo-colonial exploitation of African football players in Europe (Darby 2002).

By re-enacting the portraits of notable Africans in European history, Diop invites his audience to reflect critically on contemporary migration from Africa to Europe, a dominant theme within the European public sphere and a key topic in recent national

elections across Europe. Not only does Diop place contemporary migration in a wider historical context, but he also calls attention to the fact that migration has always shaped Europe's heritage and identity, thus exposing the idea of an 'original' Europe (which populist parties eagerly promote) as false. In his work, Diop compares the situation of African football players in Europe to the situation of Africans who played important roles in European history: they are admired for their contributions, but they are never really considered 'European'. Belley's story sheds light on the reality of African football players in Europe, and vice versa, the reality of this 'African soccer royalty' (Diop, quoted in O'Hagan 2015) also highlights the precarity of Belley, who was similarly celebrated and denounced. Although he was a respected citizen and political representative of France, Belley was arrested in 1802 by Napoleon's general on Saint-Domingue (Dubois and Scott 2010, 5). The 'French Citizen Belley' who had served as a captain in the French army died in a French prison in 1805. By then, Saint-Domingue had become the independent nation of Haiti and was lost to France, but by then Napoleon had also managed to reinstate slavery in the French Empire, to remain in place in Guyana, Guadeloupe, Martinique and Reunion Island until 1848.

Conclusion

'If I'm honest, my primary interest in Europe is its black history,' writes Evaristo, because while '[t]he grand and sometimes terrible white European histories have been channelled into every creative medium,' the 'hidden histories are still waiting to be sourced for creative enterprises – to enter Europe's collective memory, to become enshrined in our myths' (2008, 6). Evaristo and Diop embark on such creative enterprises. Artistically re-narrating the stories of Black people in Europe, they establish geographical and historical dialogues between Europe, Africa and the African diaspora that re-write European history and that challenge the prevailing narrative of Europe as White.

I have suggested that the lens of adaptation helps to understand how Evaristo and Diop call attention to the politics of visibility and belonging. But to what extent do adaptations that make Black perspectives on European heritage visible succeed in contesting the notion of Europe as a White space? What are the implications of adaptations such as these for the categories of 'European heritage' and 'Europe'? These questions arise out of the nature of adaptation, which not only changes but also inevitably reaffirms the 'original' it revises (Van Weyenberg 2013).

It could be argued that the discussed works 'Africanize' European heritage or that they celebrate 'Afro(euro)pean' heritage. To me these notions bring to mind Rey Chow's discussion of 'Europe and its Others,' the dominant comparative paradigm in which the conjunction 'and' signals 'a form of supplementation that authorizes the first term, Europe, as the grid of reference, to which may be added others in a subsequent and subordinate fashion' (Chow 2004, 294). Chow refers to the genre of the novel, which outside of Western Europe is 'almost always invoked with a national or ethnic qualifier' (e.g. 'the Japanese novel') (296). Those who use 'the novel' but really mean 'the English novel' problematically 'require others to name themselves *as other* even while they retain the generic term as the grid of general intelligence, the center that generates additional information' (296). Might the qualifier 'Afro' in 'Afro(euro)pean' similarly reaffirm 'Europe' as a grid of reference which itself remains unchanged? Is such a categorization in danger

of reaffirming and resolidifying 'Europe' as a category that, without the addition of the qualifier 'Afro', continues to exclude Black perspectives?

In the Dutch weekly magazine *Vrij Nederland* Nnenna Belia reflects on exactly this question. She discusses the photograph 'Girl on bike' that Johnny Pitts took of her as part of his *Afropeans* project. 'Why was I photographed?', she asks, '[w]as I picked out by Pitts? Look at her, she is clearly not European, she is Afropean. Why is one of my best school-friends, who is British-Dutch and carries the same passports as I do, European, while I have to go through life as Afropean?' (Belia 2023).¹⁰ Belia writes that while the term 'Afropean' may be liberating for Pitts, for her it does the opposite: 'It feels like a sticker that shows how I, and my fellow-Afropeans, are different from the "normal" Europeans,' because 'with terms such as Afropean, the emphasis is more on the afro and less on the pean.'

Belia emphasizes how 'very European' she has always felt, but she also highlights the politics of belonging by relating how travelling across Europe confronted her both with the reality of racism and with her privileged position as someone in possession of a European passport: 'Wherever I go, I am pointed at and noticed and asked for legitimation because I don't look European enough. At the same time, I can go wherever I please, precisely because on paper I am so European.' Belia repeatedly asks, 'Can I please just be European?', a question that points to the ambiguity of the label 'Afro(euro)pean'. It is this ambiguity that Evaristo and Diop engage with. While they could be said to 'Africanize' the categories of 'European heritage' and 'Europe', 'Afro(euro)pean heritage' and 'Afroeuropa' are not their end-goal. Rather, I argue, by adapting categories that many Europeans continue to conceive as universals, Evaristo and Diop reveal received understandings of these categories as racialized particulars. In this way, even if *Soul Tourists* and *Project Diaspora* demonstrate that a decolonized and inclusive Europe is far from realized, they put a 'Europe' on the horizon that would no longer be synonymous to White (Gilroy 2004, xii) and that, in the true spirit of universality, would include all voices, histories and identities.

Notes

1. This article began as a paper for the 'AfroEuropeans' conference in Brussels in 2022, which I wrote together with Margriet van der Waal. I thank Margriet for her insights and contributions. I also thank Paulina Aroch Fugellie for her helpful comments on an earlier draft.
2. <https://bevaristo.com>.
3. Ibid.
4. <https://www.omarvictor.com>.
5. Ibid.
6. Hauthal (2017) also engages with adaptation in her analysis of *Soul Tourists* as a rewriting of the travel genre.
7. All references are to the (2006) Penguin edition.
8. Eddine and Maoui Hocine (2019), too, focus on genre, as they analyse *Soul Tourists* in terms of magic realism.
9. <https://www.omarvictor.com/copy-of-being-there?pgid=Inejleye2-ad2f7d30-ea5d-4464-b5e5-06a218c0e5e0>
10. All quotations are my translation.

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