



## UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

### In de ban van het ras. Aardrijkskunde tussen wetenschap en samenleving 1876-1992

Mok, R.J.M.

**Publication date**  
1999

[Link to publication](#)

#### **Citation for published version (APA):**

Mok, R. J. M. (1999). *In de ban van het ras. Aardrijkskunde tussen wetenschap en samenleving 1876-1992*. In eigen beheer/ASCA Press.

#### **General rights**

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

#### **Disclaimer/Complaints regulations**

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

## Summary

This study looks into the use of the concept “race” in geography textbooks within secondary education for over a hundred years. The immediate reason for this study was the observation that race was until recently generally used in school textbooks as a neutral geographical term, whilst one would have expected that the experience of the Second World War had discredited the use of the concept of race. Furthermore, in many critical studies of racism, the point is emphasised that “race” should exclusively be seen as a social political construction. However, even in 1991 two teaching courses for the early years of secondary education still used racial terms when characterising the current multi-cultural society.

This study goes back as far as 1876, the year in which the first HBS [type of Dutch secondary school] opened its doors. This date was taken, not in order to give a precise account of the development of the use of the term race, but in order to become familiar with the manifestations of racism in the Netherlands; not the violent open variations, but the “normal” variations, which are embedded in the culture and in common expressions to such an extent that they go unnoticed unless they are being challenged by other discourses. Geography textbooks in particular are appropriate sources. The subject deals with people and cultures and presents categorisation by race. Geography textbooks offer discourses which are of a scientific and a social nature. Consequently this study has also become a cultural analysis; the historical view sheds light on the present culture. Generations of Dutch people have been in contact with these geography books. They have contributed to their view of the world and have indirectly left traces in the present Dutch culture.

Quantitatively the attention given to race in geography books is not that great and all in all only a small percentage of the total content of these books is of concern in this study. Nevertheless, the meaning of even casual applications of racial terminology is of importance rhetorically. Population groups, the people of continents or countries were in the first instance denoted by race. In addition race functioned, at least for the white race, as a major foundation for identity. Readers too were addressed in terms of this identity. This race could act as an active and speaking subject. Even in abstract texts, where physical-geographical subjects were primarily dealt with, this subject could provide coherence. In old textbooks, for example opinions on climate, natural plant growth or coastal formations are shown to be governed by imperialist motives. The white race embodied this endeavour. That old school books offer themes which are

relevant to present-day representations, is borne out by the fact that they can be still found in the latest generation of schoolbooks analysed in this study.

This study also investigates themes and processes of meaning surrounding the term race, and the human or global view created in which the white race would acquire superiority. Style, arguments, choice of topics, thematic ordering and narrative aspects can all convey superiority, not only in written texts but also in pictures. By way of case studies the discursive process will be demonstrated and analysis of the discourses will be explored as deeply as possible.

In the course of time changes have occurred in the discourse. In older books people, race and class were closely connected. All these social categories were given super hereditary qualities. They formed a basis for identity in which race was always the first category of division. These connections are no longer made in later textbooks. In very old books at times it is claimed and argued explicitly that the white race is basically superior. This is never put across in more recent books. However, the image of white superiority has come about throughout the whole period by means of various textual strategies, some very subtle. The interference of class, women and nationality has long since disappeared, but the "white race" has been able to attract many positive qualities. A neutral application of racial terms proved to be impossible in the end.

The study finishes by formulating a number of points of attention for intercultural teaching courses. These are teaching courses which didactically and in the presentation of topics have been aligned with the cultural and ethnical diversity in society, and which aim at balanced social representations. Only in this way can prejudice and discrimination be combated. The use of the term "race" as characterising cultural diversity can then be banned.

### ***Structure of this study***

This study is interdisciplinary. The relation to other areas of research and disciplines determines, together with the theoretical framework, the structure, the choice of case studies and the methodological principles of this study.

Chapter 1 *Race and racism in discourses* contains the theoretical framework for the analyses of older and more recent discourses. On the basis of this it will become clear why presenting a categorisation by race can be problematic from an inter-cultural education point of view, even if the aim is only to define people biologically or physically.

The social historical context is important for determining the meaning of race. For analysis of current texts we ourselves as language users mainly employ this context. As far as the oldest books are concerned we will have to create a

context, based on other, for example, scientific texts.

Chapter 2 *The scientific preparation* deals with this context. It becomes clear how much the social representations of races, social class, of men and women are interwoven synchronously and diachronically and define a dominant subject. By also studying a number of original scientific studies from an intertextual viewpoint, we get an idea of metaphors, themes and arguments of superiority and inferiority, which propagate or undermine the image of superiority of the white race.

Categorisations by race form only part of the total geography teaching course. Their content becomes interesting when we read them in the light of other chapters. That is certainly of relevance in the oldest books of the corpus. They are still very much influenced by natural history discourses, in which an almost holistic coherence plays a large role. From this discursive coherence point of view, I will be analysing a number of geography textbooks from around 1900. The analyses in Chapter 3 *The natural geography* show how themes from a racial and imperialistic discourse are included in the chapters dealing with the physical geography and dealing with the plant and animal world. The qualification of geography as “natural” strikes a chord with the positivistic investigation climate of that period, which has a strongly rhetorical effect. The analyses focus on the place allotted to the reader: their identity is Dutch, European and white with a “natural” position and mission.

Travel stories of explorers have been an important source of geographical knowledge. They have always appealed to the imagination, enjoyed great popularity and have inspired others to undertake travel. Chapter 4 *On a journey* describes how, notwithstanding the image of geography as a value-free and rational science, narrative elements of these stories affect textbooks and give shape to inequalities of “race”. Books from the period between 1900 and 1940 are central in this chapter, with special attention given to the description of Africa.

Chapter 5 *Black* contains a separate analysis of this metaphor. Black is always opposite to white and systematically inferior to it. In this metaphor the discourses of the explorers and the racial discourses coalesce: “black” refers to the impenetrability of the continent, and to the exterior of the inhabitants. The inter discursive relationships make it clear how rigid many essays on Africa were and still are.

Chapter 6 *Jews and anti-Semitism (1900-1945)* contains a short study of the way in which Jews and anti-Semitism are dealt with in textbooks. Traditionally geography does not give these subjects a great deal of attention, but there are some similarities in representations which are relevant.

Sometimes racism is seen as a special discourse of the body. Chapter 7 *The Photograph* deals with this discourse. Photographs confront us literally face to face with the representatives of various races. In the older textbooks these representations are the form of (fine) engravings, after 1900 photographs replace these as illustrative material. As well as ranking the photographs and the subtitles, the position of the photographer the photographed subject and the viewer are also analysed. The material for this is taken from *Kern-geografie* [Basic geography] and *Land-en volkenkunde voor de middelbare school* [Physical geography and anthropology for secondary schools]. These courses jointly influenced the face of geography teaching from 1930 until the sixties. By comparing the various editions we get a good picture of the constants and variables in the race discourse and we can discover what influence the war years have had on this.

The theoretical assumptions of new and old racism were the reason for discussing the Dutch scientific studies on races from that time in Chapter 8 *Science between 1930 and 1959*. Central is the question of how the scientists reacted to the implementation of racial theories in Nazi-Germany and the murder of Jews. The analyses of their discourses qualify the theory of new racism. In addition we find there explanations for the wide interest in "races", as also in textbooks post 1945.

What changes can be detected in the discourse on races in textbooks published after 1950? This question is answered in Chapter 9 *Towards an intercultural perspective*. The question of racial disposition, popular with the scientists, will influence this race discourse. Apart from "disposition" I also deal with the way in which "development" is discussed. Both terms have racial connotations and are dealt with in textbooks from the superior viewpoint of the Western world. The end of this chapter contains an analysis of efforts which have been made in textbooks to present society in such a way that cultural diversity is the norm, without any elevating of one culture above the other. This results in criteria with which, in my opinion, inter cultural textbooks or other teaching aids must conform.

