Technologies of similarities and differences : on the interdependence of nature and technology in the Human Genome Diversity Project

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The Human Genome Diversity Project (HGDP) aims at mapping genetic diversity of world's populations. Doing so, geneticists are not only interested in the genetic differences between these populations, but also in learning via the genes about their migration history. The HGDP became controversial. It was debated whether the initiative would reify racial categorisations based on genetic differences and would put fuel to debates about race and racism. This book offers a study of this project. However, rather than an examination of the controversy as such, it investigates what genetic diversity is.

Based on an ethnography of laboratories where genetic diversity is being studied, a number of core practices and technologies are analysed. Genetic diversity, as these analyses show, is neither a stated message in the DNA, nor a construct of geneticists. It is rather an effect of scientific practices, where the work of geneticists, DNA and technologies are aligned to produce it. While giving insight in the daily work of geneticist, this book addresses the normativity of that work and shows how objects and technologies gain politics. It makes clear how race and sex get built into technologies and how these become part of a "nothing strange going on" kind of practice. Given the central role of genetics in our society this book calls for an approach where normative issues, such as race and sex-differences, are not only traced in human action and agency, but especially in scientific routines and technologies.

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