

Dutch scientists and the UNESCO Statement on Race

BRAM HARKEMA* & FENNEKE SYSLING**

ABSTRACT

Central to this paper is a survey held among Dutch scientists in 1951 after the publication of the first UNESCO Statement on Race. The Statement, issued by a committee of experts at UNESCO, was a condemnation of scientific racism and declared that race was a social myth. The statement led to strong international criticism from physical anthropologists and geneticists, because they disagreed with the dismissal of the concept of race and because they felt poorly represented on the committee of experts. This paper traces the reception of the first Declaration on Race among scientists in the Netherlands to demonstrate how the Statement's impact differed in different contexts. The survey about the Statement organized by Dutch anthropologists shows how Dutch racial scientists used the Statement to distance themselves from Nazi racial science by employing a rhetoric of humility, insistence on the difference between scientific findings and moral choices, suggestions for alternative conceptualizations of race, and a strategic internationalism to connect with the international community of experts. The success of this strategy can be concluded from the fact that one of the organizers of the Dutch survey, physical anthropologist Rudolf Bergman, was invited, very last minute, to participate in the expert meeting of biological scientists that formulated a second UNESCO Statement on Race, issued a year after the first.

Keywords: racism, anthropology, UNESCO, Statement on Race, strategic internationalism

Introduction

In 1950, five years after its founding, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) published its first Statement on Race, one of its initial major efforts to combat racism and disseminate scientific facts.¹ It was prepared by a committee of experts, the majority sociologists, and was a radical anti-racist answer to Nazi-era scientific racism. 'Race is less a biological fact than a social myth' was its provocative starting point. Its other articles emphasized that, although races could be defined

* Van Hogendorpstraat 164-hs, 1051 BX Amsterdam, the Netherlands. E-mail: bjharkema@gmail.com.

** Department of History and Art History, Utrecht University, Drift 6, 3512 BS Utrecht, the Netherlands. E-mail: f.h.sysling@uu.nl.

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as populations who differed genetically from others, the term was usually used more loosely and erroneously for religious, national or cultural groups. The best option would therefore be to drop the term 'race' altogether.² However, when the statement was made public, the declaration was greeted not only with praise but also with harsh criticism. This critical response came from biologists, geneticists and physical anthropologists, who considered themselves experts on race and felt they had been ignored. They particularly deprecated the call of the Statement to eradicate the scientific concept of race entirely.

UNESCO took the allegations of conceptual weakness seriously and convened a second meeting of scientists, this time inviting a preponderance of geneticists and physical anthropologists. In 1951, it published a second Statement on the Nature of Race and Race Differences. The second Statement, like the first, stated that cultural, national and religious groups should not be confused with racial groups and emphasized that all people should be treated equally. However, in the second statement, race was restored as a valid concept and defined as an 'anthropological classification showing definite combinations of physical (including physiological) traits in characteristic proportions'. The declaration remained inconclusive about the relationship between race and mental and social aspects, but the hope was that future genetic and anthropological studies would clarify this matter.

The two Declarations on Race have played an important role in the history of post-World War science and race. Historians now emphasize that the two declarations signal a 'decisive transition in the scientific community from a presumption of racial inequality to a presumption of racial equality', in the words of Perrin Selcer.³ Although the dismissal of racism in science was an important change, historians now also characterize the Statements as attempts to purge anthropology and genetics of their racist pasts and to present them as neutral ways of understanding human differences.⁴ The two statements also widened the gap between sociologists and cultural anthropologists on the one hand and physical anthropologists and geneticists on the other. As historian Michelle Brattain argues, '[w]hat actually seems to have replaced scientific racism was a stalemate over what had become the default assumption, or null hypothesis, about racial differences'.⁵

One of the signatories to the second, 1951, Statement on Race was Rudolf Bergman, a physical anthropologist from the Netherlands. He received a telegram from project leader Alfred Métraux at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris on 1 June 1951 containing an invitation to the expert meeting that was to discuss the content of the declaration, scheduled to commence only three days later. The other experts invited to the meeting were well-known international geneticists and biologists like anthropologist Harry Shapiro and geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky. Rudolf Bergman never attained this degree of international fame with his scientific work. So how did he end up on the list of signatories to the famous Second Statement on Race? And why was he invited at such short notice?

2 UNESCO, Statement on Race, Paris, July 1950.

3 Perrin Selcer, 'Beyond the Cephalic Index: Negotiating Politics to produce UNESCO's Scientific Statements on Race', *Current Anthropology* 53, supplement 5 (2012) s173–s184, s173.

4 Jenny Bangham, for example, argues that 'genetics was established in the postwar decade as a seemingly purified, universally applicable and politically neutral way of understanding human difference and ancestry'. J. Bangham, 'What Is Race? UNESCO, Mass Communication and Human Genetics in the Early 1950s', *History of the Human Sciences* 5 (2015) 80–107, 83.

5 Michelle Brattain, 'Race, Racism, and Antiracism: UNESCO and the Politics of Presenting Science to the Postwar Public', *American Historical Review* 5 (2007) 1386–1413, 1390.

The short answer to Bergman's invitation to Paris in 1951 is that the Dutch Anthropological Society [Nederlands Genootschap voor Anthropologie], in conjunction with the Dutch UNESCO Centre, had organized a survey among Dutch scientists asking them to what extent they agreed with the first declaration.⁶ In other countries, channels like scientific journals were used to express unease about the Statement. In Britain, for example, the anthropological journal *Man* was the vehicle for much of the criticism. The Dutch Anthropological Society chose not to communicate only with the readership of its journal and was the only country to organize a survey among professors, not only in anthropology but in all scientific disciplines: an attempt to engage with scholars with a variety of backgrounds. After analysing the answers, the society sent the results of the survey and their recommendations to UNESCO. Bergman's invitation was probably a last-minute token of appreciation for this Dutch investment in the question.

In this article, we use this episode to examine how scientists in the Netherlands, especially those specialized in race, reflected on the concept of race after the Second World War. We show that the UNESCO Declaration presented an opportunity these scientists used to distance themselves from racial science as it was propagated in Nazi Germany. We have discerned four strategies that they adopted: First, they used a rhetoric of humility, arguing that research on race was still in its infancy, much was still unknown, and that physical anthropology was a descriptive science. The last argument links to the second strategy, the insistence on a difference between scientific findings and political or moral choices. This strategy was used to explain the differences between 'normal science' and 'Nazi science', in which, supposedly, scientists and politicians had abused science that was itself neutral. Third, although there was little agreement about what exactly race was and this was an ongoing discussion, Dutch scientists used several different versions of race to suggest new, less tainted avenues of research. Finally, the UNESCO Declaration provided an occasion for Dutch scientists to connect with the international community of experts on this topic and its message of scientific universalism. They also hoped to convince this international community that the Dutch had something to say on matters of race and science. We call this strategy strategic internationalism. In the following sections, we follow Dutch racial scientists' reactions to the publication of the Statements and indicate the different strategies wherever they are discernible.

This Dutch reaction to the first UNESCO statement and the story of their involvement in the second, shows, as Sebastián Gil-Riaño has recently argued, that the (first) Statement 'appears more like a tangled crossroads than a discrete signpost' and that its message was received and recycled differently in different parts of the world.⁷ In the Netherlands, the statements did not represent a clear break with the past. They were used by scientists to try to purge racial science of its connections with Nazi Germany and to align themselves with the bigger, international, players in the field. As in other countries, physical anthropologists and geneticists found themselves opposed to sociologists and cultural anthropologists, but the Dutch conceptualizations of race did not entirely follow the Anglo-Saxon pattern.

6 The Nederlands Genootschap voor Anthropologie had existed since 1949 when the Nederlandsche Anthropologische Vereniging merged with the Nederlandsch Nationaal Bureau voor Anthropologie. See J.J. de Wolf, *Eigenheid en Samenwerking. 100 jaar antropologisch verenigingsleven in Nederland* (Leiden 1998). The Dutch Anthropological Society incorporated physical anthropology, ethnology and archaeology.

7 Sebastián Gil-Riaño, 'Relocating Anti-racist Science: the 1950 UNESCO Statement on Race and Economic Development in the Global South'. *British Journal for the History of Science* 51, 2 (2018) 281–303, 287.

The First Statement

UNESCO was founded in 1945 with the aim to contribute to peace and security through educational, scientific and cultural programs. Its objective was to overcome racism and prejudice by access to education, by advancing knowledge, and by conserving the heritage of history and science. As Jenny Bangham notes, UNESCO saw science as ‘an instrument for the promotion of social harmony’.⁸ True knowledge would lead to a better world. In the UNESCO Constitution, racial inequality was explicitly mentioned as a causal agent of war and its constitution, in the words of its first director-general Julian Huxley, ‘expressly repudiates racialism and any belief in superior or inferior “races,” nations or ethnic groups’.⁹ From 1949 the UNESCO social sciences program put scientific questions of race on the agenda. Furthermore, besides preparing its first Statement, UNESCO also began a study on race relations in Brazil and launched an education campaign about race.

The Statement on Race was conceptualized as an authoritative declaration that represented the latest and universal scientific insights. It was seen, in the words of Brattain, as a ‘final authoritative rebuttal to Nazi-style scientific racism’ and was based on an optimistic view that internationalism, science, and education could wipe the slate clean.¹⁰ This focus on Nazi Germany was understandable since UNESCO was founded as a response to the war but this insistence also meant that other instances of racism in the world tended to be obscured. The historian Selcer argues this was an easy way to silence any political discussions, as the entire world was appalled by the atrocities of WWII. The omission in the statement of more controversial consequences of racial thought, like segregation issues in the US or colonial relations, can be seen as a tactic to garner support for the statement among colonial powers.¹¹

The expert meeting that drafted the first Statement on Race was attended by sociologists, anthropologists and one philosopher. The group included an African-American scientist, and Brazilian, Indian and Mexican participants as well as three Jews. Its best-known contributor was Ashley Montagu, the *rapporteur* of the committee, who had been a renowned scholar but was better known as a public anthropologist and for his controversial publication *Man’s Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race*.¹² Historians agree with his contemporaries that Ashley Montagu had a decisive influence on the text of the Statement.¹³ This was made possible because of the lack of consensus within the committee and among the twelve scientists who were asked to comment on the first draft. The criticism of these twelve included many of the objections that would be repeated after its publication, for

8 Bangham, ‘What Is Race?’ (n. 4) 82.

9 Julian Huxley, *UNESCO: Its Purpose and its Philosophy* (Washington 1947) 6–7.

10 Brattain, ‘Race, Racism, and Antiracism’, 1386. For other accounts of the Declarations on Race see Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York & London 1989) 197–203, Elazar Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars* (Cambridge 1992) 341–346, Tracy Teslow, *Constructing Race: the Science of Bodies and Cultures in American Anthropology* (Cambridge 2014) 284–315 and Siep Stuurman, *De Uitvinding van de mensheid. Korte wereldgeschiedenis van het denken over gelijkheid en cultuurverschil* (Amsterdam 2009) 463–472.

11 Selcer, ‘Beyond the Cephalic Index’ (n. 3) 175.

12 Nadine Weidman, ‘An Anthropologist on TV: Ashley Montagu and the Biological Basis of Human Nature, 1945–1960’, in: Mark Solovey & Hamilton Cravens, *Cold War Social Science: Knowledge Production, Liberal Democracy and Human Nature* (New York 2012) 215–232, 217.

13 Brattain, ‘Race, Racism, and Antiracism’ (n. 10), 1393.

instance, a reluctance to reject that there were certain differences between racial groups, for example, in temperament and personality.¹⁴

The Statement declared that the concept of race as it was used by most people was a social construct, that there were no inferior or superior races, and that there were no differences in mental capacities between humans.¹⁵ It also stated that scientists had been unable to find any such thing as a pure race, that national or religious groups were not races, and that race mixing had no negative consequences. The Statement did not eliminate the concept of race entirely, and suggested that scientists were able to discern groups based on gene frequencies or their physical and physiological characteristics. The Statement, however, declared that these groups had more in common than they were different, were dynamic, and that anthropologists disagreed about the exact classifications. For all practical purposes therefore, it was better to use 'ethnic group' instead of 'race'.

The Statement was given wide international coverage. UNESCO estimated that '133 news stories, 62 articles and editorials, 6 full reportages' and another '50 to 70 mentions' had been published.¹⁶ Reactions from the scientific community to the first Statement were also quick to arrive and, with the exception of the general message of anti-racism in the statement, many found fault with the text of the Statement. The Royal Anthropological Institute in the UK, whose members included many physical anthropologists, was very vocal in its criticism. In its letter to *The Times* it pointed out that the document was based on 'insufficient evidence'.¹⁷ The journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, *Man*, published the Declaration with an invitation to comment on it and its columns were flooded with critical letters from scientists.¹⁸ Especially the final claim in the statement that all humans were naturally inclined towards an 'ethic of universal brotherhood' was hotly contested.¹⁹ The physical anthropologists said that this was a claim to which 'surely very few anthropologists anywhere would yet venture to commit themselves'.²⁰ In the US reactions were similar. The anthropologist Carleton Coon, a controversial scholar because of the racist conclusions in his scientific work, wrote that dozens of scientists had paid the statement 'lip service and then tore it apart'.²¹

The majority of the responses focused on the distinction between race as a biological and a social concept, the relationship between racial differences and mental abilities (that the declaration said did not exist), and the assertion that biological studies showed that human beings are predestined to universal brotherhood, dismissed by commentators as wishful thinking rather than scientific fact. But, as Perrin Selcer notes, the responses also showed that the 'conflicts over the race statements were disputes over scientific authority' as much as they were about race.²² The physical anthropologists and geneticists

14 Ibidem, 1397.

15 UNESCO, *Statement on Race*, Paris, July 1950.

16 Quoted by Bangham, 'What Is Race?', 85.

17 W. Fagg, 'Unesco on racialism. Letter to the Times', *The Times* (London, England) August 15, 1950, 5.

18 'U.N.E.S.C.O. on race', *Man* 50 (1950) 138–39.

19 UNESCO, *Statement on Race*, Paris, July 1950.

20 'U.N.E.S.C.O. on race', 138.

21 Carleton Coon to Mrs. Dees, February 8, 1961, Carlton Coon Papers, National Anthropological Archives, Suitland, Md, quoted by Brattain, 'Race, Racism, and Antiracism', 1399.

22 Selcer, 'Beyond the Cephalic Index' (n. 3) 5173. See for this argument also G. Schaffer, *Racial Science and British Society*, 1930–62, 123.

were especially annoyed that they had not had sufficient representation on the prestigious UNESCO committee despite the fact the text commenced: 'Scientists have reached general agreement'.

Racial science and the reception of the UNESCO Declaration in the Netherlands

Human differences had been a subject of scientific inquiry since the seventeenth century and this research intensified with the obsession with quantification in the second half of the nineteenth century.²³ From the outset of this research, however, internal criticism between racial scientists had questioned how quantifiable human differences really were and the usefulness of the concept of race as a valid tool for classifying and judging mankind was increasingly being doubted.²⁴ When the field of genetics developed in the early twentieth century, scientists hoped that the genotype would give the answers to questions about human diversity that the phenotype would not, but genetic studies only underscored the complexity and dynamic nature of mankind.

The Netherlands had a long tradition of research on race, and the 1930s had been an especially fruitful decade in that respect, both in its homeland on the North Sea and in its colonies.²⁵ Much of this research was data collection without reflection on the role of race in science and politics, and there was definitely an awareness of developments in Nazi Germany (although not as much as one might have expected in hindsight).²⁶ Scientists were keen to point out that there was a difference between the science and its political consequences in Germany.²⁷ Dutch physical anthropologists, for example, portrayed their discipline as a descriptive science, thereby freeing it from political implications. The ambivalence of this approach is shown in the case of anti-Semitism that was generally condemned but with scant attention paid to how Jews featured in the scientists' own research. It was a strategy to show German science in a bad light, while redefining the scientists' own discipline as normal, as Ineke Mok and Frank van Vree have shown.²⁸

A good example of the racial scientists of this period is the anatomist J.A.J. Barge, who regularly lectured on race and mental character. Barge would later gain some fame with his lecture against Nazi racial science on the day the University of Leiden was closed by the Germans in 1940. Barge argued that race was a strictly anthropological category used

23 Some classics are: S.J. Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York 1981), Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800–1960* (London 1982) and George W. Stocking (ed.), *Bones, Bodies, Behavior: Essays on Biological Anthropology* (Madison, Wis 1988). More recent books are Tracy Teslow, *Constructing Race*, Elise Smith, *Skulls, Nation and Empire: The Rise and Fall of British Craniology, 1800–1939* (Cambridge forthcoming), Fenneke Sysling, *Racial Science and Human Diversity in Colonial Indonesia* (Singapore 2016).

24 Smith, *Skulls, Nation and Empire*, Sysling, *Racial Science* and Franz Boas, 'Changes in the Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants', *American Anthropologist* 14, 3, (1912) 530–562.

25 Fenneke Sysling, 'Geographies of Difference. Dutch Physical Anthropology in the Colonies and the Netherlands', *Low Countries Historical Review* 128 (2013) 105–126.

26 H. Biervliet et al., 'Biologisme, racisme en eugenetiek in de antropologie en de sociologie van de jaren dertig', in: F. Bovenkerk et al. (eds.), *Toen en thans. De sociale wetenschappen in de jaren dertig en nu* (Baarn 1978) 208–235.

27 A. Ascher and D. Cohen (eds.), *Stemmen van Nederlanders over de behandeling der Joden in Duitschland* (Amsterdam 1935). This is true also for Steinmetz's, *De rassen der menschheid. Wording, strijd en toekomst* (Amsterdam 1938) which was written in reaction to developments in Germany.

28 I. Mok, 'Een beladen erfenis: het raciale vertoog in de sociale wetenschap in Nederland 1930–1950', in: M. Eickhoff, B. Henkes and F. van Vree (eds.), *Volkseigen: ras, cultuur en wetenschap in Nederland 1900–1950* (Zutphen 2000) 129–155, 149 and F. van Vree, *In de Schaduw van Auschwitz* (Groningen 1995) 143.

to define human diversity, and that linking physical and mental characteristics was reprehensible. As long as anthropology did not give definite answers, Barge argued, Christian values should guide moral conduct, an example of the strategy of distinguishing scientific from moral judgements.²⁹ As Frank van Vree notes, however, he himself regularly broke this principle of not linking physical and mental characteristics by insisting in other places that mental racial characteristics could be spoken of ‘only with great caution and very generally’ and wrote about different races applying evolutionary terms like primitive versus civilized. There was no gap between ‘normal’ and ‘perverted’ (that is, Nazi) science as it was defined after the war.³⁰

In the immediate post-war period, racial scientists in the Netherlands continued to do what they had been doing before the war. Physical anthropologist Arie de Froe, for example, had fabricated official documents during the war to ‘prove’ scientifically that Jewish individuals were in fact not, or only a small percentage of them, of the Jewish race, to keep them out of the hands of the Germans. Yet he continued his morphological studies of race after the war.³¹ This is comparable to the rest of the scientific world, in which ‘the mood in the postwar scientific community was hardly one of guilt or humility’.³²

After the publication of the Statement on Race, however, these scientists suddenly found themselves targeted as a profession and were called upon to defend themselves. In the Netherlands, the publication of the Statement on Race on 18 July 1950 immediately caught the attention of several newspapers. A few short news articles were devoted to the event on the same day the statement was published. In these articles, the content of the statement was copied, as was the claim that this was the most authoritative publication to do with race ever produced.³³ In the months after the publication of the statement, however, the reactions published were more critical.

UNESCO stated that the international reaction ‘in South Africa and (...) other countries, especially in Holland, has not been good’.³⁴ One article in Elsevier Weekblad by J.A. van Hamel, a legal scholar with a regular column in this weekly magazine, was particularly worrying in Paris. What caught UNESCO’s attention was probably not that Van Hamel’s view was very influential but more the fact that he had also written that UNESCO had repudiated the first statement, which was patently untrue. Alfred Métraux wrote a letter to Elsevier to straighten matters out.³⁵ Although Van Hamel praised UNESCO’s intenti-

29 S. Broere, ‘Synthesis and Race: Barge, Buytendijk, and the rassenvraagstuk of the 1930s’, *Studium* 9, 4 (2017) 185–201.

30 F. van Vree, ‘Ras, volk en cultuur. Andere perspectieven op wetenschappelijke tradities’, in: M. Eickhoff, B. Henkes, F. van Vree (eds.), *Volkseigen: ras, cultuur en wetenschap in Nederland 1900–1950* (Zutphen 2000) 11–31, 14 and 26.

31 H.U. Jessurun d’Oliveira (ed.), *Ontjoodst door de Wetenschap. De wetenschappelijke en menselijke integriteit van Arie de Froe onder de Bezetting* (Amsterdam 2015). See also Lawrence A. Zeidman and J. Cohen, ‘Walking a Fine Scientific Line: the Extraordinary Deeds of Dutch Neuroscientist C.U. Ariëns Kappers Before and During World War II’, *Journal of the History of the Neurosciences* 23, 3 (2014) 252–275.

32 Selcer, ‘Beyond the Cephalic Index’ (n. 3) 2175.

33 This statement was, for instance, published in the Dutch newspapers: *Het Nieuws*, *Dagblad van het Noorden*, *de Leeuwarder Courant*, *de West*. Data retrieved from *Delpher*.

34 UNESCO Archives, Paris, 323. 12A 102; Statement on Race. Part II, 68: Alfred Métraux to Ashley Montagu, March 2, 1951, Unesco Papers, quoted in Brattain, ‘Race, Racism, and Antiracism’, 1398.

35 UNESCO Archives, Paris, 323. 12A 102; Statement on Race. Part II: Correspondence, A. Métraux to the editor of Elsevier Weekblad, 27 February 1951.

ons to steer people away from a fatal racial ideology, he wrote that the Statement blurred [wegdoezelen] the differences between people so conspicuous in international politics. If a good understanding between people was to be achieved, an acceptance of their differences rather than a rosy idea of unity would be the best course to steer.³⁶ Van Hamel's opinion about racial differences was probably based to some extent on his earlier travels in the Netherlands East Indies, that led him to recommend a future in which the different races (the Dutch and indigenous Indonesians) 'each with their own aptitudes and peculiarities' would co-exist peacefully instead of breaking up in 'interminable and ineffectual [calls for] self-determination'.³⁷

Victor Koningsberger, biologist and then director of the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam, also had doubts about the UNESCO Statement. At the meeting of the Utrecht Province Society for the Arts and Sciences [Provinciaal Utrechtsch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen], of which he was the president, he argued that, although UNESCO might be right to conclude that racial discrimination should be terminated, this was making the same mistake as the Nazis, namely: making science political. 'In my opinion', he wrote, 'only one answer to Unesco should have been heard from biological circles: hands off'. Koningsberger argued that moral decisions should be based on moral values not on biology, again assuming the possibility of making a clear distinction between the two.³⁸

The Groningen professor of genetics M.J. Sirks used his inaugural lecture as Chancellor of the University to admonish those whose judgement was being 'clouded by sentimental considerations and economic self-interest', who denied 'the existence of difference in mental ability between the peoples of the world'. This group included the members of the UNESCO race committee who had 'with a confident but entirely unfounded optimism' declared that, given the same environment, members of all human groups would perform in a similar manner.³⁹ Three years earlier, in a discussion about the racial question, Sirks had insisted that there were psychological differences between races. Had not the south of the Netherlands produced many great painters while the north had none at all? He also saw these differences as the reason for an 'instinctive aversion' between races.⁴⁰

To distinguish his own brand of science from that of the Germans, he said that the 'Race Question' was a dangerous matter because it led to 'self-glorification' and 'misleading racial propaganda'.⁴¹ As did other scientists like Rudolf Bergman, he used two arguments to emphasize the difference: firstly, he found fault with seeing race and nation or religion as one and the same thing and he emphasized that Jews were not one race but that most Jews were of the Oriental, Mediterranean or Armenian races. Secondly, he stressed the importance of constitutional types within populations. He argued that humans could be classified according to body types: the muscular, digestive and cerebral,

36 J.A. van Hamel, 'Unesco en de schim van Gobineau', *Elsevier Weekblad*, 17 February 1951.

37 J.A. van Hamel, 'Nederlandsche indrukken van een reis door Indië', *De Gids* 103 (1939) 304–322, 310.

38 V.J. Koningsberger, 'Biologie en samenleving', in: *Verslag van het verhandelde in de sectievergaderingen en de algemeene vergaderingen van het Provinciaal Utrechtsch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen* (Utrecht 1951) 9–31, 27. 'Zelfstandig karakter der natuurwetenschap', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 25-05-1951, 7.

39 M.J. Sirks, *Verantwoordelijkheid op grond van erfelijke aanleg* (Groningen 1951) 17.

40 H.W. Methorst and M.J. Sirks, *Het bevolkingsvraagstuk* (Amsterdam 1948) 138–9.

41 *Ibidem*, 141.

and these existed among all races.⁴² Consequently, he defined race as strictly physical and genetic difference, not as national and religious difference, but then blurred the picture by insisting that all mankind shared the same body types.

Others like the sociologist Wim Wertheim sided with the first Statement. 'Is it not grotesque' [potsierlijk], he wrote about Sirks' lecture, 'that a professor brands renowned scholars, representing different branches of science, who contributed to the well-known UNESCO Statement on Race, incompetent and apparently thinks that we shall accept him on his own authority'.⁴³ In his book *Het rassenprobleem: de ondergang van een mythe* [The Race Question. The demise of a myth], Wertheim argued that differences between races were a consequence of social environment, not of inherited differences.⁴⁴ As he was a sociologist, however, his views will not have made much of an impression on Sirks who considered those sociology professors who ignored inherited differences guilty of a 'moral crime'.⁴⁵ Sirks' reaction to the Statement and those of the other scientists disclose their attempts to save race from the hands of the UNESCO reformers, by insisting on a difference between Nazi conceptions of race and their own, between science and morality, and also between wishful thinking and the (Dutch colonial) reality.

The survey

In 1951 a survey, co-organized by the Dutch Anthropological Society and the UNESCO Centre, was held to collect all the different opinions among professors in the Netherlands.⁴⁶ Founded by two students and based in Amsterdam, the UNESCO Centre was a bottom-up organization involved with the circulation of UNESCO ideas in the Netherlands. Officially, every member state of UNESCO had a national committee but, as the Netherlands was not very active in UNESCO, its national committee was likewise pretty inert. The UNESCO Centre was a different initiative but it seems as if it was acknowledged by the headquarters, as UNESCO sent its director-general, Jaime Torres Bodet, to open the centre.⁴⁷ The Centre had a library stocked with all UNESCO publications and important anti-war and anti-racism literature.

The Dutch Anthropological Society considered the UNESCO Declaration relevant to Dutch scientific circles and this was, we argue, a case of strategic internationalism: an opportunity to hitch on to discussions taking place in the wider scientific world. Because

42 Ibidem, 145–151. He also emphasized the importance of biology over environment on personal development. See 'M.J. Sirks, 'De mens als biologisch object', in: M.J. Sirks, G. Kraus, P.J. Bauman et al., *De mens in het licht der wetenschap* (Groningen 1955) 7–23. See also S. Snelders, 'National Socialism, Human Genetics and Eugenics in the Netherlands, 1940–1945', in: Ad Maas and Hans Hooijmaijers (eds.), *Scientific Research in World War II: What Scientists Did in the War* (London 2009) 109–120.

43 W.F. Wertheim, 'Intelligentieverschillen in het licht der sociologie', *De Nieuwe Stem* 7 (1952) 9–18, 11.

44 W.F. Wertheim, *Het rassenprobleem: de ondergang van een mythe* (The Hague 1949).

45 Sirks, *Verantwoordelijkheid op grond van erfelijke aanleg*, 17.

46 J.J. van Loghem, 'Gelijkwaardigheid der rassen van Homo sapiens in discussie', *Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Geneeskunde* 95 (1951) 1322–1323, 'Het rassenvraagstuk. Enquête over Unesco's verklaring', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 13-01-1951, p.2, 'Rassenvraagstuk', *Nieuwe Courant*, 19-01-1951, 'Verklaring over rassenkwestie', *De West: nieuwsblad uit en voor Suriname*, 18-07-1950 and 'Unesco over de rassenkwestie: een "legende"', *Leeuwarder courant: hoofdblad van Friesland*, 18-07-1950, 1.

47 'Unesco-centrum in de hoofdstad: studenten namen het initiatief tot de oprichting', *Haarlems Dagblad* 8th November 1949, 5, retrieved from *Krantenviewer Noord-Hollands Archief*: <http://nha.courant.nu/issue/HD/1949-11-08/edition/0/page/5>.

UNESCO presented itself as a new platform for scientific discussions, in which international, and even universal, agreements on contentious topics could be reached, it was important that the Dutch participate in this scientific discussion. In organizing the survey, it showcased the UNESCO Statement as an important issue, and tried to claim a place at the international scientific table by producing a systematic answer to the Statement, thereby hoping to be heard on the international stage.

Two board members of the Dutch Anthropological Society, Professor Rudolf Bergman and Dr Adèle van Bork-Feltkamp, and the Centre's first chairman, E. Alderse Baes, translated the first UNESCO Statement into Dutch and sent this translation and their questions about it to all Dutch professors and to members of the Anthropological Society.⁴⁸ It seems that they were interested in discovering the opinions of a wider range of people than the limited circle of biologists, anatomists, physical anthropologists or geneticists; those who claimed race as their specialty and who had led the chorus of criticism.

The starting point, the questionnaire stated, was that there were strong objections to the Statement in the Netherlands. The board of the Society believed that the race question had a biological foundation while the roots of racial discrimination lay elsewhere. Therefore the premise of the survey was the distinction between science and politics/morality. Scientists were asked to give their opinion on three questions: a. Do you agree with the spirit of the Statement? b. Do you agree with its argumentation? c. Do you have any additional information that clarifies the problem?⁴⁹ A translation of the statement was enclosed with the questionnaire.⁵⁰

Seventy-nine responses were elicited from the Dutch scientific community: twenty each from Utrecht and Amsterdam, fifteen from Leiden and the rest from Groningen, Nijmegen, The Hague, Wageningen, Delft, Maastricht and Tilburg. Half the contributions were from the natural sciences (medicine, biology, genetics and mathematics) and half from the humanities (literature & philosophy, social sciences and law). Sixty-eight out of seventy-nine answered question A. in the affirmative, five respondents did not agree with the spirit of the Statement. Some scholars felt the statement was 'too emotional in its expression', 'not realistic enough' or 'more like a wish than the ascertaining of a fact'.⁵¹ One respondent answered that, if the conclusions of the first Statement were to become a reality, 'the social position of white men would decline'.⁵² Twenty-three respondents specifically stated that they agreed with the spirit of the statement on ethical grounds.

Although the message of the statement was generally well received, with very few exceptions, its scientific argumentation was criticized by all respondents. Many scientists took issue with the use of the word 'ethnic group' instead of 'race', because ethnic groups were

48 De Wolf, *Eigenheid en samenwerking*, 81. Apparently Bergman found the UNESCO Statement an important matter for debate. He discussed it, for example, with his students. De Wolf, *Eigenheid en samenwerking*, 81.

49 Leiden Special Collections DH 1456, Archief van het Nederlands Genootschap voor Antropologie, Nederlandse Ethnologenkring, Nederlandse sociologische vereniging (niet-Westerse sectie), hun voorgangers en rechtsopvolgers, en verwante instellingen [Archive of the Dutch Anthropological Society, the Dutch Ethnologists Circle, the Dutch Sociological Association (non-western section), their predecessors and successors and related institutes], 46.

50 The translation itself was later criticized: 'De verklaring van de UNESCO over rassenproblemen', *De Nieuwe Stem* 7(1952) 19–26.

51 Leiden Special Collections DH 1456, 46, Report of the Survey, 2.

52 *Ibidem*, 1.

considered groups who shared culture, language or religion, not genes or physical traits. Any ban on the word race while it was so widely used was thought to be very confusing.⁵³ Others said that not enough attention had been paid to psychological factors in race. A number of authors wrote that the mixing of populations could yield good results, even though the authors of the report had warned that it was doubtful whether 'more remote groups influence each other so favourably'.⁵⁴

The report on the results of the survey included several conclusions. It said that generally speaking there was disapproval of the combination of scientific and ethical arguments and hence the report advised that these be kept separate. It also argued that the inability of scientists up to that moment to demonstrate racial difference in terms of character and temperament did not necessarily mean that all races were the same in this respect. This contention was a combination of the strategy of humility and an insistence that human differences should not be entirely ignored. The report warned against easy generalizations and advocated that new research, both biological and sociological, needed to be done. These thoughts reveal the similarity between the Dutch ideas and the British criticism in *Man*.

The committee that set up the survey and wrote the report, Van Bork-Felkamp, Bergman and Alderse Baes, also added its own recommendations. They too emphasized that ethical and scientific arguments should be kept separate. They concluded that 'the mixing of scientific and ethical arguments is generally disapproved of. Giving each of these arguments its full value, it seems better to distinguish them categorically'.⁵⁵ This move would enable those whose ethics were based on empirical knowledge to assess the scientific arguments, while those with 'an aprioristic morality' could engage in the ethical arguments. They also made the case for the inclusion of heredity in the definition of race, because they saw obvious differences in the provision of 'life-necessities' among races and wanted to see more research done to discover whether these differences were based on hereditary factors or milieu; an insistence on a version of race that was not constructed on social or environmental factors but considered inherited traits only. Any attempts to uplift underdeveloped groups would have to be premised on the conclusion that milieu factors shaped lives, because, if the culprit turned out to be heredity, these aims were 'doomed to fail'.⁵⁶

In terms of future research, the committee saw great promise in the investigation of constitutional types, Bergman's interest, and, as we saw earlier, also one of Sirks'. Systematic research into comparative psychology, although challenging because of the difficulty in finding comparable groups and tests, was also suggested as an option. The third avenue the committee suggested was historical research that, the report hinted, would lead to the conclusion that, compared to other people, the 'Aryans' did not score very highly on the scale of historical successes.⁵⁷

Unfortunately, the authors of this paper have been unable to find the original responses to the survey. In the archives of Gerard Tichelman, a colonial civil servant and self-taught ethnologist, is a letter inviting Tichelman to submit his reaction and the text of the declaration with his annotations. Tichelman scribbled several lines next to the suggestion to drop

53 *Ibidem*, 2.

54 *Ibidem*.

55 *Ibidem*.

56 *Ibidem*, 4.

57 Leiden Special Collections DH 1456, 46, Report of the Survey, 5–6.

entirely the word race, which hints that he was one of those who criticized this dismissal of the term. Even more lines can be found next to the sentence ‘race’ is not so much a biological phenomenon as a social myth’. The most succinct of his remarks is in the margin where the Statement writes, ‘There is no evidence that race mixture as such produces bad results from the biological point of view’. ‘On the contrary!’, was Tichelman’s reaction.⁵⁸ Three years earlier, Tichelman had published *Indonesische Bevolkingstypen* [Indonesian Human Types], a popular booklet with an account of the racial make-up of Indonesia. Even though his booklet humbly declared that physical anthropology still could not answer most racial questions in the Archipelago, it was the science he favoured to describe the different people of the region.⁵⁹

One other letter has been kept in the archives. It contains the response of Father Gregorius (original name: Lambertus Johannes Maria van den Boom), who taught cultural anthropology in Tilburg and had taken physical anthropology classes in the 1930s.⁶⁰ Father Gregorius probably speaks for the majority of the respondents as he agreed with the spirit of the report and by and large concurred with the argumentation. His comments are related to his preferred definition of race. The statement says that there was no relationship between genetic traits and national, religious, or cultural characteristics. Gregorius stated that the Jews, like the Frisians, were not a race because their unity had been created by cultural and religious ties but, because they did share some specific racial characteristics, there was probably some relationship between historical and religious isolation and genes. He was opposed to the eradication of the term race, because in his view ethnic group referred to a cultural rather than a biological unit. ‘Confusion will only increase if physical anthropology too speaks of ethnic groups.’⁶¹ He was also convinced that personality was developed by upbringing and free will, but that temperament was also important and was racially informed. In short, his version of race incorporated the social and environmental influences on genes as well as character difference.

The results of the survey in the Netherlands show a scientific community that felt the Statement was important enough to discuss and also considered their own opinions relevant to the larger international discussions, something on which the initiators of the survey also insisted. The responses ranged from agreement with the spirit of the report to extreme scepticism. And, as in the first reactions to the statements, the respondents considered strategies like the insistence on a difference between science and ethics, on the provisional state of much research and on specific conceptualizations of race that the respondents considered quite promising, whereas the aim of the Statement was to eradicate them all.

Bergman and the second Declaration on Race

The report of the survey had been drafted in part at least by Rudolf Bergman, because it is thoroughly permeated with his stamp. Bergman was a Dutch anthropologist (and herpetologist) who although he had been appointed to a professorship at the University of Amsterdam was hardly a scholar of note. Soon after finishing his medical studies in Amsterdam,

58 Special Collections Leiden, Tichelman collection, DH 814, 1208.

59 G.L. Tichelman, *Indonesische bevolkingstypen* (Rotterdam 1948).

60 Father Gregorius is the person who sent the archive of the Dutch Ethnologists Circle to the H1456 archive in the Special Collections in Leiden, so it is possible that he personally added the letter with his response to the UNESCO folder. This explains why his letter is the only one to survive.

61 Leiden Special Collections, DH 1456, 46, letter Father Gregorius to the board, 1.

Bergman moved to the Dutch East Indies in 1928 to become a lecturer at the Netherlands Indies Medical School (NIAS) in Surabaya, moving on a few years later to the Medical School in Batavia (present-day Jakarta). After the Independence of Indonesia, Bergman was forced to return to the Netherlands, where he became a physical anthropologist at the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam. On behalf of the Institute, Bergman was appointed a professor in tropical anthropology at the University of Amsterdam in 1949.⁶²

In his inaugural lecture delivered just three months before the first UNESCO Statement, Bergman did dismiss the racial ideas of the Germans and of the Japanese but insisted that the denial of difference was the wrong way to tackle problems between people; an argument in the same category as calling the 'ethic of universal brotherhood' wishful thinking. He believed that differences did exist in work performance and intellect, but he added the disclaimer that, as such topics were hard to research as social circumstances varied so much between people, it was better not to generalize on the matter.⁶³ He believed that physical anthropology could provide answers to social problems, and that societal choices based on other, ethical considerations or on 'irrational belief' had not proven to be a better alternative.⁶⁴

The Dutch report of the survey heavily featured two of Bergman's interests: constitutional types and historical research. Bergman used both types of research plus physical anthropology in his studies of Jan Pieterszoon Coen, the (in)famous Dutch East India Company official. He drew a portrait of Coen's constitution, as 'it is not only the measurable physical characteristics that follow the laws of heredity.'⁶⁵ Instead of concentrating on quantifiable features, constitutional research focused on temperament and body types and their distribution within races. Bergman's conclusion was that Coen was a mixture of the phlegmatic and passionate types and had a leptosome body type (tall and slender). Years later he wrote a study of Coen's skeleton.⁶⁶ This historical and constitutional research was a reaction to the quantification obsession of earlier physical anthropologists and provided an alternative version of human difference shifting attention from quantified difference to a more holistic form.

It is unlikely that the organizers of the Statement on Race had heard of Bergman's studies on the physique and skeleton of Coen. His name does not feature in the correspondence between the organizers about whom to invite, even though they did their very best to find scientists from outside the US and the UK. By March or April UNESCO had already invited the majority of its scholars and Bergman's name was not on the list of participants drawn up on 1 June. However, the sources suggest that the Netherlands staged a last-minute drive to be invited, a final attempt at strategic internationalism. The report of the Dutch survey was dated 19 May 1951, hence it was sent to UNESCO only after that date. On 30 May, the hitherto rather flaccid Dutch National UNESCO Committee sent UNESCO a letter

62 D. van Duuren et al., *Physical Anthropology Reconsidered. Human Remains at the Tropenmuseum* (Amsterdam 2007) 24–27.

63 R.A.M. Bergman, *Over anthropologie. Rede bij het aanvaarden van het ambt van hoogleraar aan de gemeentelijke universiteit van Amsterdam, uitgesproken op maandag 24 april 1950* (Groningen 1950) 6–7. See also R.A.M. Bergman, *Inleiding tot de fysieke anthropologie* (Haarlem 1957) 32.

64 Bergman, *Over anthropologie*, 8.

65 R.A.M. Bergman, 'Jan Pieterszoon Coen: een psychographie: bijdrage tot de leer der constitutietypen', *Tijdschrift voor Indische taal-, land- en volkenkunde* 73 (1933) 1–56, 2.

66 'Jan Pieterszoon Coen. De overbrenging van het gevonden gebeente', *Soerabaijisch handelsblad* 26-06-1934.

asking information about a forthcoming conference on race problems. 'As you may know', it said, 'the various documents on race problems are being studied by Netherlands experts who have experience in the field of anthropology.'⁶⁷ One day later, Van Bork Feltkamp sent UNESCO a telegram intimating that the Dutch Anthropological Society was surprised no one from the Netherlands had been invited.⁶⁸

This light pressure exerted on UNESCO was successful. Bergman's invitation was very last-minute: Van Bork-Feltkamp received a telegram from Alfred Métraux on 1 June 1951, just three days before the expert meeting was scheduled to begin. It was sent to the address of the Netherlands Anthropological Society, rather than to Bergman's office at the Royal Tropical Institute, so it was clearly an answer to Van Bork-Feltkamp's telegram.⁶⁹ Besides the enthusiasm shown by the Dutch scientists and the Anthropological Society who wanted to have a say in this matter, the fact that Bergman had had experience in Southeast Asia might also have been an incentive to invite him. Bergman was initially invited as an 'observateur' of the meeting but was promoted to full participant after the first morning.⁷⁰

The second expert meeting was composed of geneticists and physical anthropologists only (although Ashley Montagu later joined) and discussed the conclusions that had been reached in their fields concerning race. We know little about what Bergman contributed to the discussions because there are no detailed minutes of the meeting, but in his own account of the meeting, Bergman recorded that several paragraphs in the statement, for instance, on definitions of race, led to discussions: The Swedish geneticist Gunnar Dahlberg, for example, argued one single gene could separate one race from another, whereas others preferred to use the term race for the largest human groups. Other topics were less contentious. The conference exhibited a common discomfort with the term 'ethnic group' and felt that this should be omitted from the new statement, despite the fact that the entire committee thought that the world 'race' had been abused. The participants also agreed that there was no biological problem with racial mixing; they even stressed that pure races had never existed, hence there would have been no 'pure races' to be lost in the mixing.⁷¹

Bergman himself writes that he could add to the discussions about temperament and character in Paragraphs 11 and 12 in the first statement, categories he preferred to define as to emotions (temperament) and activities (character). However, these paragraphs did not make it into the second statement, nor are any traces of Bergman's interest in historical studies or constitution visible in it. Bergman claimed that one important point he had made was to insist to the contrary when Professor Zuckerman said that it had never been proven that people of different races could live together peaceably. In his refutation he described the Dutch experience in the Netherlands East Indies and the Caribbean colonies, that he apparently thought had been positive.⁷²

Rapporteur L.C. Dunn wrote that the committee did reach common ground on many subjects. However, its members did not succeed in finding a new word for 'race', but insisted

67 Secretary Dutch National UNESCO Committee to the Director-General of UNESCO, 30 May 1951, UNESCO Archives 323.12 A 102/064 (44) "51".

68 UNESCO Archives, 323.12 A 102/064 (44) "51".

69 National Archives (NA), The Hague, Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) Archives: 4518: 'Telegram Métraux to Van Bork-Feltkamp'.

70 NA, KIT archives, 4518, 'Kort verslag van mijn reis naar Parijs' [Report of my journey to Paris], 1951, 1.

71 Ibidem, 2.

72 Ibidem, 3.

that race should be used in a stricter anthropological sense. They also failed, noted Dunn, to reach unanimity about the nature of man in respect to his 'behaviour toward his fellows'.⁷³ When the draft of the statement was finished, sixty scientists were invited to comment, revealing how much UNESCO invested in unanimity. UNESCO also sent the preliminary draft to be published in *Man*, inviting scientists to comment and trying to take out the wind of the sails of any criticism before it was published officially.⁷⁴ However, it also showed that there was no way out of the disagreement among scientists. Eventually, the draft was unaltered and the comments published separately.⁷⁵

The 1951 Statement on the Nature of Race and Race Differences still retained an anti-racist stance but is more distanced, more biological and less ethical. The conclusion the second statement shared with the first was a general belief that there were no fixed groups, but that humankind knew diversity because of the distribution of its genes, which were subject to evolutionary change. Both documents also stated that cultural, national and religious groups should not be confused with racial groups and emphasized that all people should be treated equally.⁷⁶ However, in the second statement, race was restored as a valid concept and defined as an 'anthropological classification showing definite combinations of physical (including physiological) traits in characteristic proportions'.⁷⁷ The declaration was inconclusive (or vague) about the relationship between race and mental and social aspects, and hope was placed in future genetic and anthropological studies: a rhetoric of humility that paved the way for future studies on exactly this topic.

In a radio interview after his return, Bergman explained that one of the Statement's most important conclusions, in his opinion, was a definition of race and an insistence that religious, linguistic and national groups were not races. 'So Jews or Americans or Muslims are not races?' asked the interviewer, to which he answered no. 'Do you think racial mixing is undesirable?' was another question. 'There is no biological reason to oppose race mixing', answered Bergman. 'Of course there might be some social difficulties but we must remember that, as social structures change, this factor too will change'.⁷⁸

Conclusion

The first and second Statements paved the way for two standpoints that would each continue to be influential among different groups: that of race as a social construct and that of race as a legitimate scientific category worthy of further study. In the Netherlands, the Statement did have some immediate political impact: in the discussion on the future of New Guinea, for example, the argument that Papuans were a different race from Indonesians commonly cropped up but, after the publication of the first UNESCO Statement, Dutch politicians decided that the race argument should be avoided in future

73 L.C. Dunn, *Report on meeting of physical anthropologists and geneticists for a definition of the concept of race, held at Unesco House, from 4 to 8 June 1951*, UNESCO archive 323. 12A. 102: Statement on Race. Part II.

74 Alfred Métraux, 'U.N.E.S.C.O.'s New Statement on Race: The Provisional Text', *Man* 52 (1952) 90–91.

75 Among those who were invited to comment on the second Statement were two scientists from the Netherlands: Arie de Froe and R. Remmelts (Instituut voor praeventieve geneeskunde, University of Leiden) but UNESCO did not receive their reactions. *The Race concept. Results of an inquiry* (Paris 1952) 92–97.

76 Tracy Teslow, *Constructing Race*, 307.

77 *Statement on the nature of race and race differences*, Paris, June, 1951. Text by L.C. Dunn.

78 NA, KIT archives, 4518: 'Bijvoegsel reisverslag naar Parijs van 4–8 Juni' [addendum to travelogue].

publications, 'as it could be interpreted by the international community as a form of discrimination.'⁷⁹ On the other hand, we know from the work of Ineke Mok and others that racial categorizations continued to be used in geographical and ethnological handbooks and many other places as well.⁸⁰

For scientists in the Netherlands who were working on race, the first Statement offered an opportunity to join in an international discussion on the definition and role of race in science. We call this a case of strategic internationalism, because becoming part of an international discussion gave Dutch scientists several advantages. It was an opportunity to be heard and become known internationally and the fact that the Dutch took active steps to join the second meeting means that they really saw a role for themselves there. It also showed the Dutch public that Dutch racial scientists were taken seriously by international organizations. The authority of UNESCO itself was never called into question, and it gave Dutch race scientists the opportunity to show that race was considered a valid research topic.

Other strategies striving to present race as a valid and innocent object of research are discernible in the discussion. There was the rhetoric of humility that presented racial science as a science that was merely collecting data and still unable to come with grand claims about mankind. Linked to this, most respondents to the Dutch survey argued that racial science should be separated from the political and moral ideas on which some people (Nazis) wanted to base them. Several definitions of race were debated, with many different nuances: differences based on one gene or many, in- or excluding mental characteristics or on quantifiable or more holistic features, as Bergman suggested. The latter approach did not gain much popularity in the years that followed. Physical anthropology and genetics on the other hand continued their work in much the same vein as before.⁸¹

79 Vincent Kuitenbrouwer, 'Beyond the "Trauma of Decolonisation": Dutch Cultural Diplomacy during the West New Guinea Question (1950–62)', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 44, 2 (2016) 306–323.

80 R.J.M. Mok, *In de ban van het ras. Aardrijkskunde tussen wetenschap en samenleving, 1876–1992* (Amsterdam 1999).

81 M. Roede, 'Rassen, waan of werkelijkheid. Met aandacht voor het verzetswerk van Arie de Froe', in H.U. Jessurun d'Oliveira (ed.), *Ontjoodst door de Wetenschap. De wetenschappelijke en menselijke integriteit van Arie de Froe onder de Bezetting* (Amsterdam 2015) 103–190.