

COMMENTARY

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Race and sameness: on the limits of beyond race and the art of staying with the trouble

Amade M'charek*

*Correspondence:
a.a.mcharek@uva.nl
Department
of Anthropology, University
of Amsterdam, Postbus
15509, 1001 NA Amsterdam,
The Netherlands

Abstract

In this commentary I argue that rather than going beyond race, we need to 'stay with the trouble' of race (Haraway 2016). Race, I want to suggest, is precisely 'trouble' because it is produced and sustained in everyday practices. To make this more tangible, I will zoom in on one specific case, a homicide case, that was eventually solved through forensic technologies and attend to the impact of the case on society. Analyzing responses in the media to the identification of suspect, I focus on the sense of community that emerged, and unravel how race came to play a role. To push the point that we need to attend to the intricacies of race, I will switch focus from an analysis of race in relation to difference, to race in relation to sameness. As I argue, while difference tends to be politicized, sameness has been viewed as curiously apolitical and thus functions as the baseline. Here I suggest to differentiate between sameness as *otherness* and sameness as *us-ness*. My analyses is aimed at inviting us to stay curious about what race is made to be in practice, how it manifests and what politics it does.

Keywords: Race and sameness, Race and forensics, Race and familial searching

By way of introduction

"Tell me, there is no biological race, is there?"

You won't believe how often I get this question. The persons posing it seem to be looking for reassurance. Looking for comfort that there is nothing in nature, nothing deep down in our bodies that supports the persistent racism in society. This question is understandable, but each time I start answering it, I stutter. I stumble over my words because the question seems simple, yet is full with ambiguities. Ambiguities that are to be found in the two words: biology and race. Neither of these words can be reduced to one singular entity. Biology e.g., is not a matter of genes, bones, or a matter of hormones. And it is not a matter of adding up all these entities: genes, hormones, bones, skin colour and what have you. Biological differences are perhaps best viewed as con-figurations of scientific work, where theories, methods, and materials, such as samples (however biological), chemicals, devices are configured to present a 'natural phenomenon' (e.g. M'charek, 2005). This phenomenon is not less valid or less true, by contrast. The point is that it is

irreducible to one thing. The power of its truth-claim, its validity, is precisely the fact that it is this meticulous con-figuration. I cannot convince you of the existence of the melamine gene by making you stare at your skin. As Bruno Latour and many others have shown, we need a laboratory to do that. The gene is not simply in your body but exists in the connection between bodily material, books, journals, labs, samples and data. This allows us to study it, act upon it, determine e.g. whether it is mutated and the cause of cancerous cells, etc. The gene is con-figured, even if it seems independent and self-contained. Are you noticing the detours I am taking? If what I have just said offers some space for maneuvering and for navigating the biological differently, it is the juxtaposition of biology and race that takes my breath away. This juxtaposition is precisely suffocating because it has a long and crusted history.

Race had long been the prime working horse in studies of human diversity (Stocking 1982). Since the late nineteenth century the prospect of finding the racial type has driven a feverish collection of data. In the slipstream of colonial projects and equipped with novel statistical methods scientists started to measure: length, skin color, head shape, hair structure, iris color, lip thickness, ear-form, fingerprint, the shape and print of hand and foot, and so on and so forth. More details, better methods and larger data sets would determine once and for all what the human racial types were, or so the story went. But as the data accumulated it became clear: race was an illusion. It could not be pinpointed down to real existing human bodies.

But the very idea of race was also doing work in society. Assumed hierarchies, where the white man figured as the crowning glory of evolution were mobilized to justify injustice. To justify colonial extractions, killings, slavery, humiliations.... Some aspects of this violence have been in the open, others silenced.

In the aftermath of WWII, in 1951, the UNESCO issued the Statement on Race indicating that there is no biological basis for race. Throwing this anti-racist stone surely got the pond of science and society to ripple (Selcer, 2012). However this does not mean that the preoccupation with biological race had come to an end. And while genetic research has produced ample evidence for the non-existence of race, race is definitely making a come back. First, while most genetic research teaches that differences are probabilistic and cannot be pinpointed to specific groups of individuals, as these results start to circulate social categories are mobilized to do precisely that (M'charek et al., 2020). This conflation of statistical distributions with social categories, which happens in science and society, renders the fluid genetic results rigid. Second, given the persistence of social problems, e.g. crime or poverty, and the enormous interest in the life sciences, it is assumed that life science research will finally provide us with the answers, contributing to the biologization of social categories (Azoulay, 2006; Duster, 2003).

So, how can I simply answer the question that biological race does not exist, when it is constantly produced? Never simply as biology. Always as a configuration of nature-culture. This then means that we have to 'stay with the trouble' of race (Haraway, 2016). But it also means that we cannot assume we know what race is, and that we need to examine how it is produced and what it is made to be in practice.

In this commentary I analyse a homicide case that evoked racist violence against asylum seekers. This case could be analysed in terms of its effects on policy and legislation, both, in the area of forensic policing allowing for the use of race as a biological category

in DNA research (M'charek, 2008; M'charek et al., 2020) and migration policy (de Koning, 2012) and could help us elaborate the policy implications of “Beyond Race” (Saharso & Scharrer, 2022). Here I mobilize it to engage in a conversation on what “beyond race means for the category itself” (ibid). I show how in practice deferent configurations of race emerge and demonstrate their normative content including their tendency to engender belonging or violence against others. In line with the opening above, my analyses show that race is not a clearly defined category, but rather a mode of ordering (Foucault, 1970) that is diversely shaped in practice, mobilizing intricate elements, such as the care for dairy cows.

Tweeting

It is Monday morning 19th of November 2012. I woke up very early that morning and was listening to the radio when I heard the news. After twelve years of exhaustive criminal investigation, a suspect was found in the highly mediatized rape and murder case of Marianne Vaatstra. I could not believe my ears. In a population screening involving almost 8.000 men, the forensic examiners managed to find a match within one month. I knew that they were expecting at least some 9 months of work before coming to a conclusion. It was even more surprising that they found a full match, because the screening was done in the context of familial searching. It was assumed that the suspect would not be among the participants, but that a partial match between a participant and the profile of perpetrator would indicate that the suspect is a relative of that particular participant. Earlier that morning, at 5.06 am, the famous, and late Dutch crime reporter Peter R. de Vries was the one to share the news via twitter, stating: “Man arrested. White suspect. Frisian, lives 2.5 km away from crime scene. 100% DNA-match! [Man gearresteerd. Blanke verdachte, Fries, woonde 2,5 km van plaats delict. 100 procent DNA-match!].

This quote indicates that I was not the only one who was surprised. Since the *news* was not merely the fact that the suspect was identified or that this was a result of a 100% DNA match, but also the fact that the suspect was ‘white’ and ‘Frisian’. Following the media circus, I was indeed mesmerized by how the Frisian-ness of the suspect came to play a central role. Over the years in the Netherlands and beyond we have come to know the Marianne Vaatstra as a case that functioned as prism, highlighting xenophobia, racism and violence vis a vis the migrant Other (e.g. de Koning, 2012; Jong & M'charek, 2018; M'charek et al., 2020). This changed radically once the suspect was found, and gave way to a remarkable sense of consideration and care towards the community in the village where the suspect lives, towards his family and even towards the suspect himself: ‘the poor guy who lived all those years with this secret’. I was more than amazed about this response, especially in the light of the racism that has always been attached to the case. This care for the community kept resonating in my head, and over the years it had translated in questions about the issue of *race and sameness*. I should add here that I have grown attentive to sameness because of the Dutch situation. Ever since the 1990s we have witnessed a growing xenophobia coupled with rightwing nationalism and a naturalization of Dutchness (Geschiere, 2009; Mepschen et al., 2010; M'charek, 2010; van

Reekum, 2014). But the Marianne Vaatstra in particular made me think about sameness in relation to race.

In this commentary I zoom in on this issue of sameness to tease out lessons about race. I wonder whether a focus on sameness rather than on difference could help us refine our analysis of race and how it is produced and sustained in practice. Since we are in the habit of thinking race in relation to difference this has contributed to the idea that differences are produced while sameness is given, a base line. Indeed, an emphasis on difference seems to suggest that in the context of race, differences are political while similarities, by contrast, are curiously apolitical. The production of sameness, resemblance and equivalence has thus received little attention in critical analyses. Here I suggest to switch focus from difference to sameness in order to better grasp the politics of different versions of racialization.

Over the years I have produced different analysis of the Marianne Vaatstra-case, because of my interest in forensic genetics and race (e.g., M'charek, 2008, 2013; 2016; Jong & M'charek, 2018; M'charek et al., 2020). It is a case that had provoked various forensic DNA legislations in the Netherland and one in which all possible investigative technique including forensic genetic technologies have been tried out (e.g., M'charek et al., 2020). In this paper I provide but a brief history of this case and of the forensic genetic technologies mobilized, and focus on familial searching through which the case was eventually solved. I will first situate my concern with race and sameness in a theoretical context, drawing on historical as well as philosophical work. I will then give a brief account of the Vaatstra-case and a sequence of events, to subsequently elaborate the familial searching endeavor and end with an analysis of how the care for the collective figured in the media and what it might teach us about race and sameness.

On sameness and race

Critical studies of race and genomics, and of race more generally, have for good reasons been concerned with a politics of difference (e.g. Epstein, 2007; Whitmarsh & Jones, 2010). Markers that have been mobilized to suggest innate difference between groups of people, from skulls, to IQ, from genes to hormones have received ample attention (e.g. Stockings, 1982; Lewontin et al., 1984; Skinner 2006; Fujimora & Rajagopalan, 2011; Roberts, 2012; Schramm et al., 2012; Kahn 2013; Jordan-Young & Karkazis, 2019). This work has helped us to situate the work of producing differences in science and society as well as the very technologies of doing that. Importantly this critical scholarship has convincingly shown that differences are not to be located in bodies, but in the ways bodies and bodily markers are engaged and related to a variety of technologies as well as other (cultural) elements including preestablished ideas about race. This led me to conclude that race is a relational material semiotic object (M'charek, 2013). Yet, such an alertness to difference has sustained the idea that when it comes to race, differences are political (if not a negative) while similarities are apolitical. Although it is commonly acknowledged that race and racialization are based on configurations of differences *and* similarities (e.g. Epstein, 2007; M'charek, 2000), similarities, are usually taken for granted. This might in fact have deeper, more structural roots.

The historian and political scientist Siep Stuurman has written a seminal book *The Invention of Humanity* (2017) in which he shows how modernity and the modern

states of justice are based on the sameness of humans as the norm, and their equality before the law as its consequence. He argues that historically there have been three crucial 'modalities' that have helped to invent this thing called humanity. First there is the acknowledgement of a common humanness, i.e. that humans belonged to the same species. The second modality is related to the anthropological turn through which cultural differences came to be understood as variation on a common theme, assuming a shared human culture. The third modality is a temporal regime that helped to think civilization in terms of an evolutionary development, in the way that even if some peoples are not there yet, they are assumed to undergo similar development and eventually arrive in modern times to come. Although the three modes that have helped to establish the paradigm of humanity have been widely shared by different civilizations across the globe, so Stuurman argues, the coupling of equality and sameness has become pivotal in racial Europe during the enlightenment. The dictum was: to become equal, is to *become like those* who are already equal, that is, the European whites. Enlightenment thus became the obligatory point of passage for becoming equal. So, the crux of Stuurman's argument is, and important for my argument here, is that sameness had become a *normative baseline* in the modern equality paradigm. Stuurman's argument makes clear that becoming equal requires work and entails an ideological take on human relations. But the effect of sameness as the norm is that difference and deviance tend to typically attract attention, alarm or dismay.

Rather than taking sameness for granted, I focus on what sameness is made to be, how it comes about and also, to what effect. I am particularly interested in different versions of sameness and the different versions of race they bring about. Focusing on the politics of sameness my aim is to specify different modes of racialization. Doing so I was encouraged by events related to the Marianne Vaatstra-case but also by the work of Deleuze and Guattari. For Stuurman's historical analysis resonates with a theoretical take on race and face developed by Deleuze and Guattari in their essay "Year Zero: Faciality" they argue that racism is fundamentally a device for doing sameness.

Racism never detects the particles of the other; it propagates waves of sameness until those who resist identification have been wiped out (or those who only allow themselves to be identified at a given degree of divergence). ... There are only people who should be like us and whose crime it is not to be (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004: 178).

In this essay Deleuze and Guattari focus on the politics of the face and develop the concept of facialization, facialization as the effect of what they call the 'faciality machine'. The faciality machine functions as a political device and creates faces by eroding diversity and reproducing sameness.¹ While facialization operates through the abstract machine that makes sameness, those who do not move on the wave of sameness are bestialized and become killable, erasable. In Stuurman's sense, they do not enter the realm of humanity.

¹ See also Essed and Goldberg (2002) on 'cloning cultures' and Ahmed (2004) on the production of same and other through the politics of emotion.

These insights about facialization and racialization of sameness, as well as the radical othering of the non-same is strikingly relevant for the forensic setting. And as we will see, the Vaatstra case will help to illustrate that.

A non-Dutch manner of death: on sameness and phenotypic othering

Marianne Vaatstra was 16 years old when she went out partying with friends on the night of April 30, 1999, but would never return home. The next day her body was found in a meadow in the village of Veenklooster, not far from the village where she is from. The villages are in the rural area of Friesland, a Northern province of the Netherlands. Upon finding her body in the meadow the coroner who had examined the crime scene and the manner of death, concluded that she was raped and killed through the slitting of her throat. According to him, cutting a victim's throat was not a typical Dutch mode of killing. The violent death of Marianne Vaatstra had obviously moved the local population in this rural area and beyond. And because it was but one of a series of violent crimes against young girls (Jong & M'charek, 2018), it led to crowded silent marches, heated debates about social safety as well as numerous media outlets.² In addition, since the meadow where the victim was found happened to be in the vicinity of a center for asylum seekers, the societal response to Marianne's death slowly changed into racist violence towards the inhabitants of the center, who were mostly from the Middle East. Suspicion and accusations were immediately directed towards, what I have come to call, the *phenotypic other*, the inhabitants of the center (e.g. M'charek et al., 2014). Local villagers threatened to tear down the center and in October 2000 a resident of the center was stabbed with a knife by two young men when he was on his way home from the train station. Upon this, the asylum seekers organized a protest and voiced the ongoing violence and hatred they had been confronted with since the Vaatstra murder (M'charek et al., 2020). The racism and violence against refugees (throwing of stones through their windows) and volunteers was more widespread in this rural area of Friesland throughout the years of investigation (Trouw 8 December 2012). The racist response to the violent crime grew beyond the rural area to become a national sentiment, especially after a vocal rightwing member of parliament, the late Pim Fortuyn dedicated a column in a weekly magazine in which he labeled the crime as 'a non-Dutch manner of killing' (de Koning, 2012; Fortuyn, 1999). In the media the asylum-seekers center was described as 'a hotbed of criminal activities.'³ The suspicion of the local population was further fueled by the late crime reporter Peter R. de Vries who in 1999 claimed that the main suspects were two former center inhabitants. He broadcasted their pictures in his TV show. However, both assumed suspects, Ali Hassan and Mohammad Akbari, could be excluded based on DNA analysis. Yet the manner of death kept assuming power and contributing to the phenotypic othering of people housed in the center and beyond. According to the first scenario of what had happened the night Marianne Vaatstra was killed, she died because the perpetrator had cut her throat with a knife. This cutting of the throat

² The Vaatstra murder case became the most mediatized case in the Netherlands (Jong & M'charek, 2018). Also, but because of the exhaustive forensic technologies that were applied over the years, it became an internationally famous case (e.g. M'charek et al., 2020).

³ For a thorough media analysis and the racism towards the inhabitants of the asylum-seekers center, see Jong and M'charek (2018).

became a central device of phenotypic othering and of race making. As indicated, this manner of death was qualified as a non-western, non-Dutch mode of killing. The scenario that the locals had in their mind was sketched as follows:

*The perpetrator was well prepared. Like a predator looking for a prey he was waiting to attack Marianne from the bushes. After that, he killed her by cutting her throat. Given this modus operandus, the suspect cannot but be an inhabitant of the asylum seekers center.*⁴

To understand the gist what is being said here, let me give another example in which a similar scenario was sketched in an OpEd concerning a different murder case that took place in Belgium, at Brussel central station (see M'charek, 2008).

On video screens you can see them, like predators along the walls of the central station, waiting, alert and on the watch to find an easy prey in the passing herds of passengers for them to kill [...] The unlucky one will not stand a chance. The predators have knives. In childhood they have learned, during the annual sacrifice how to cut the throat of warm-blooded herd animals (Paul Belien, De Standaard, 25 april 2006).

This quote helps us to understand the framing of the knife, the use of knives to cut throats as well as those who tend to use knives. Relating this to a religious custom indicates that the perpetrator is a non-Western, non-Dutch Other and more specifically, a *Muslim* man. He is inclined to violence and killing, by using a knife. The cutting of a throat, an animal like mode of relating, thus contributes to the bestialization of the other. To put this in the words of Guattari and Deleuze, the other who resists or cannot be like us thus becomes killable (see also Foucault, 2004). Importantly here is that suspicion is typically directed not towards any specific individual but towards a whole group. A group that is phenotypically othered through markers ascribed to the perpetrator, a Muslim.

To be sure, this process of othering comes with a version of sameness. This mode of sameness, namely sameness in relation to othering, does not only racialize, it leaves no space for differentiation. A group is lumped together. An individual cannot but stand for the whole group. This version of sameness indeed reduces a group of people to one specific quality, in this case violence. While the version of sameness that is connected to otherness produces a homogenous racialized group, In what follows we will consider a different version of sameness, one that is not related to otherness, but to *us-ness*.

⁴ This so-called *modus operandus* that was articulated by the crime reporter Peter R. de Vries in a vital show dedicated to the Marianne Vaatstra-case. To be sure, in that moment in time de Vries did not support this scenario but was merely articulating a dominant view among the local population to then present the new scenario of the investigating police, namely that Marianne was not killed by the slitting of her throat, but first through strangulation in which her bra was used, after which the suspect cut her throat. Given this *modus operandus* it is more likely that the suspect was to be found among/through the local population. In this show, broadcast on 20 May 2012, de Vries has shifted position and was by then collaborating with the investigative team in a concerted effort to help persuade the local population into participating in DNA familial searching research by donating DNA.

A farmer from here: on sameness and us

Although the quality of the biological traces left by the unknown suspect were often and again praised by forensic experts, and although the investigating police has mobilized all possible expertise to find leads, during more than a decade of almost constant forensic policing, the question of who he was remained on the table.⁵ As indicated above, suspicion was directed towards the inhabitants of the asylum seekers' center. The grim situation and the constant violence had provoked forensic genetic research that, at that time in June 2000, was explicitly prohibited by the Dutch law, research into the biogeographic ancestry of the unknown suspect, based on Y-chromosomal research. The results, officially discarded because the test was illegal, were widely publicized. They indicated that by contrast to the commonly held idea among the public that the suspect was probably from the middle east (as were most of the inhabitants of the center), DNA suggests a North-Western European, and probably Dutch, ancestry and descent. Although these results did make people think, or blink, they did not take away the suspicion against the phenotypically othered.

However, this suspicion would dissolve overnight with the find of a DNA match. Almost thirteen years after Marianne's death, on the 19th of November 2012, the suspect was identified through a newly introduced DNA technology, namely familial searching. Familial searching is routinely conducted through a search in DNA databanks where partial matches might suggest that the suspect is a relative of the person in the databank. Since such DNA-databank searches did not produce any leads, it was decided to look for relatives of the suspect in the community.

After a small study into the mobility of people in that particular area of Friesland, and while finding that the inhabitants of those villages tend to stay put, 8.080 men were invited to donate DNA in search of a relative of the suspect. In the end 7.581 men participated in the study. Working with such a large number of samples it was expected that it would take more than nine months to produce all DNA profiles and to process the data. However, the forensic researchers were lucky, and already in the first batch two samples were found of which the Y-chromosomal DNA profiles matched that of the DNA found at the crime scene. This helped to focus the rest of the analysis through genealogical research that was based on family names (Meulenbroek & Poley, 2014). Within a month of genealogical mapping and targeting relevant samples from other batches, a full DNA match could be presented, leading the investigators to the suspect, the Frisian farmer, Jasper S. This find came as a major surprise. One of the forensic investigators had put it as follows: 'Jasper was just about the last person on whose door you would be knocking, with his farm and little family and all. Because you tend to presuppose a usual criminal'. Upon hearing this news, the community in the Frisian village was in dismay. 'This cannot be true. It must have been a mistake. If this is true, I lose my faith in humanity' people reacted. A woman responded: 'When everybody here believed that the perpetrator was an inhabitant of the asylum seeker center, at least that gave us some peace. You don't want it to be a father from here' (Trouw, 21 November 2012) (Fig. 1).

⁵ See for a more detailed course of events, M'charek, Toom and Jong (2020). In this case all novel forensic genetic technologies, such as DNA phenotyping and familial searching based on a population screening have been put to use. To that in the Dutch context, the DNA legislation had to be revised.

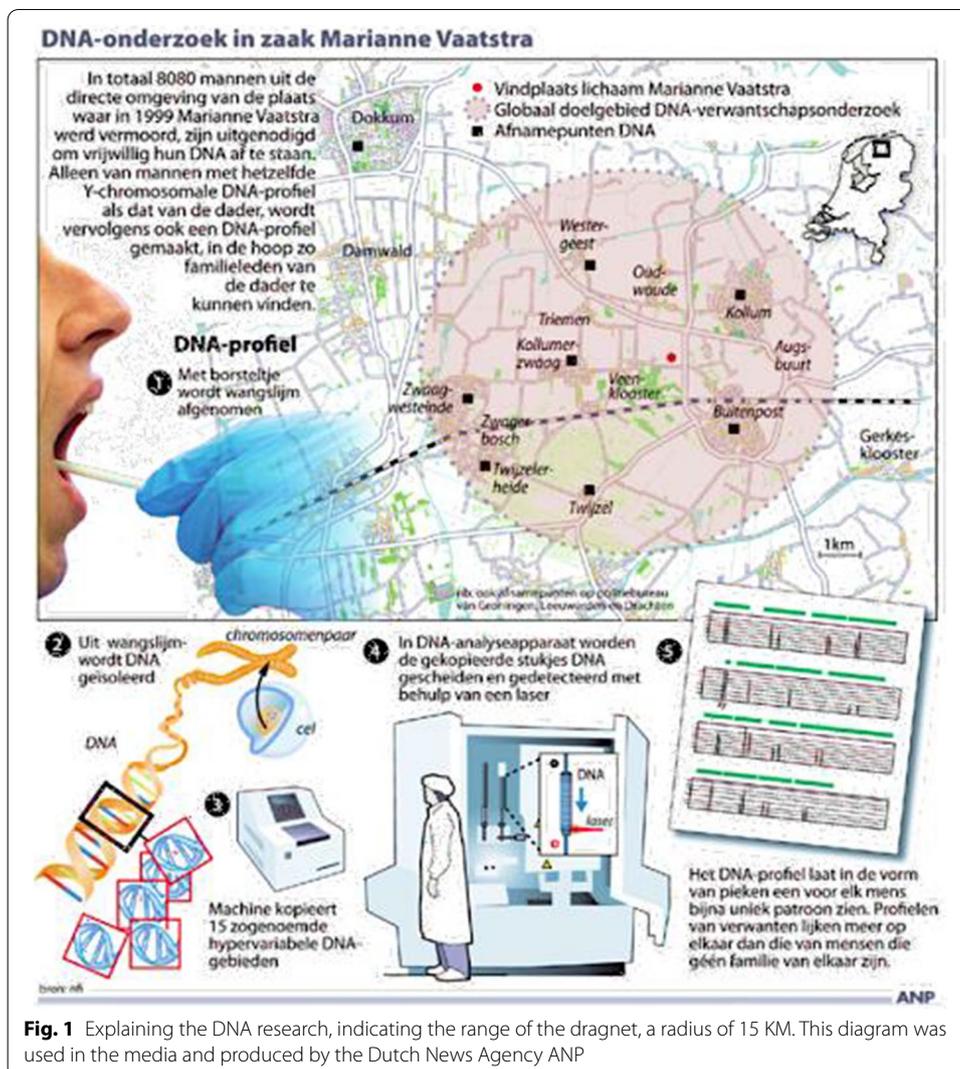


Fig. 1 Explaining the DNA research, indicating the range of the dragnet, a radius of 15 KM. This diagram was used in the media and produced by the Dutch News Agency ANP

What was remarkable about the months of preparation for the dragnet and familial searching was the sense of community that emerged. Everybody wanted to help solve the crime. But to make all men participate, a carefully designed campaign was developed. For example, the main folder through which the local population was informed about the DNA familial searching does not only take readers by the hand on what the research is about and how the DNA will be handled and destroyed after this investigation, it also included quotes from local villagers, expressing their hope that this murder case would finally be solved and that all men will show up to donate DNA. But also, the cover is consciously designed. It displays a typical Dutch landscape: a dyke, a typical Dutch activity: cycling, and a typical Dutch scenario: a family enjoying leisure time. As if to say, contributing to this DNA dragnet is a normal, Dutch thing to do. The family is connected and held together by DNA, the DNA double helix. In addition, it displays a gesture of care and safety. The young girl is cycling next to her mother. They seem to be cycling behind the father of this family. One of the police investigators explained during one of the presentations he gave in the aftermath of the case, that it was important that the father was

cycling in front of them and not behind them, because that would diminish the feeling of safety. The men cycling behind them, might be read as not belonging to the family and as chasing and threatening the mother and child.⁶ DNA research is contributing to a sense of safety of the community, or so is the message that is projected.



But I was even more struck when this sense of community became stronger when the identity of the suspect was revealed. It was not a community of violence and aggression vis a vis the (phenotypic) other, but a community of care vis a vis ‘us’ and those who belong to us. Care was not merely directed towards the family of the victim who lived in an adjacent village, but especially towards the family of the suspect and even the suspect himself. In the turmoil of media attention, this sense of *us-ness* never let go of me again; and provoked my thinking about race and sameness. In what follows I unravel this version of sameness and its relation to race. I will do so based on a selection of responses in the media.⁷

The very first tweet that was sent around at 5 am by the crime reporter Peter R. de Vries, disclosing the identity of the suspect, already entails the ingredients of my analysis and gives way to how race came to matter. The suspect was “Frisian”, “white”, a “local” and a “farmer”. The link between Frisian whiteness and his traditional occupation alerted me to race. While any of these markers by itself does not necessarily enact race, together

⁶ Jelle Tsjalsma & Ron Rintjema, talk delivered at the “Publieksmiddag Wijzer over DNA: Op zoek naar de ‘dader’ met behulp van bevolkingsscreening”, 4 November 2018 Rijksmuseum Boerhaave Leiden.

⁷ For a thorough media analysis of the case in the years before the suspect was identified, see Jong and M'charek (2018).

they become a potent technology of racialization.⁸ Upon hearing the news, the father of Marianne Vaatstra pondered: “So it is someone from our midst (*van ons*), a *farmer*, a *white man*”. A fellow villager of the suspect was quoted saying:

Well, DNA doesn't lie," mumbles Nycklo de Vries (19). But it remains hard to believe. He knew the arrested man. Just like everyone else, here in Oudwoude. A very normal, social man. With a lot of land and a livestock farm. Married, a son and daughter in her twenties (Trouw, 20 November 2012, emphasis added).

In another account of what the villagers were going through, we read:

Yesterday people in Oudwoude responded with dismay to the arrest of the friendly fellow townsman, who was always in for a chat with everyone. His family was quickly relocated to a quiet area. His nearly 100 dairy cows are being looked after (Dagblad van het Noorden, 20 November 2012).

It is in fact remarkable that the suspect is addressed as a white man. Since whiteness is the norm, it hardly ever gets articulated. However, in this case, despite the huge investment in familiar searching and by consequence the possibility that the suspect is related to the local population, the whiteness of the suspect still sparked disbelief and surprise. It thus marked the persistent suspicion that was placed on migrants and refugees, a group that was phenotypically othered. But whiteness was also related to the occupation of the suspect, being a farmer who takes care of his dairy cows and someone with lots of land. On the evening of the rape and murder of Marianne Vaatstra, the suspect and his father went out at eleven o'clock to milk the cows, we learn from his statement.⁹ He is one of us, from our midst as the father of Vaatstra said. This coupling between whiteness, land and relation to the land, as well as activity or occupation, is a classical way of racializing a community.¹⁰ However, though the suspect was made member of a community of us-ness through his colour, occupation and relation to land, the accounts above also make space for him as an individual. He is somebody everybody knows, he is kind, normal, a social man, and as we will see below, has a friendly word for everybody. Also, in a long and calm interview with his lawyer the viewer is presented a portrait, not of a monster or beast, but of a torn person, full remorse and shame for his uncontrolled behavior on that night 13 years before.¹¹ In an interview about this TV appearance, his lawyer Jan Vlug said: “There I have tried to portrait Jasper as a human being, as a nice man who had done something horrible” (Meulenbroek & Poley, 2014: 452). This room for individuality, I want to suggest, is a key element of this version of sameness in relation to us-ness. Whereas the coupling between sameness and otherness takes away all individuality and reduces individuals to a homogenous and othered group, by contrast *sameness in relation to us-ness makes space for individuality*. In this case the suspect-ness of the suspect came as a surprise because he was so normal and kind, which explains why this room for

⁸ Moreover, the racialization of the Frisian identity has a vested history in Dutch physical anthropology (see van Ginkel, 1995).

⁹ See, e.g. the news website of the Dutch national television: <https://nos.nl/artikel/489559-jasper-s-doet-huilend-z-n-verhaal.html> (last accessed 11 March 2021).

¹⁰ Other well-known examples of groups that have historically been racialized and classified through occupation are the Roma people and the Jewish people (Surdu, 2016).

¹¹ See, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HpoU5e8EuTI> (last accessed 11 March 2021).

individuality in other cases leads to the proverbial “rotten apples” that do not impact on the identity of the whole group.¹²

Sameness in relation to us-ness makes room for individuality but it does more. Above, the suspect was referred to as a family man, he is married with a son and a daughter in her twenties. The family figured prominently in the care articulated by the local villagers. The municipality organized a meeting for the villagers after which the interviewed mayor was reported saying:

About 300 residents showed up in the village hall. Bilker [the mayor] speaks after a 'modest and heartwarming' meeting. The village will not let the family down, he says. The mayor knows the parents of the arrested man. "They are overloaded with cards, phone calls and best wishes expressing support. That gives a good feeling (Trouw, 21 November 2012).

This excerpt makes clear that the family aspect of sameness is not only the fact that the suspect has children, but that he himself is a child of parents who are also part of the same community. The mayor of the village Oudwoude continues:

Everyone knows the parents; they are very well known in the village. Imagine: you lead a very normal life and then suddenly something like this happens. It was my pleasure to convey the commonly shared feeling among the inhabitants of Oudwoude. The feeling of: 'You belong here, you belong' (Jullie horen hier, jullie horen erbij). The parents were very happy with that. They responded very emotionally, in tears. They are doing reasonably well under the circumstances. I did expect that something like 'we stand by and around the family' (we staan om de familie heen) would arise, but I am pleasantly surprised that it is so strong (Dagblad van het Noorden, 22 November 2012).

It took me some time to understand how this care for the *parents* of the suspect was relevant to my analysis and to see that it signals a particular family relation. Here the suspect is not merely a family man, with his own household and children. Crucially, he is addressed as a child, the child of. Thus, by caring for the parents, the suspect becomes a child. This obviously evokes a sense of innocence, even if the child is a man who is forty-five years old, he is still addressed as the object of care and concern for his parents. In addition, the attention to the parents puts the suspect in a genealogical relation, a relation of kinship. In this way we come to realize that not only does the suspect have a family and children of his own who deserve care and attention, but he has parents, and probably grandparents, thus a history in that place. The continuation of kinship produces a *long durée* and a historical connection to the place, to Friesland and the village Oudwoude. “You belong *here*”, says the mayor. A version of autochtony and nativism (Geschiere, 2009).

¹² And it is also the mechanism through which right wing terrorism immediately leads to a psychologization of the suspects (think of Adres Breivik), rather than the default mobilization of culture, background or religion as the explanation in the case in Muslim terrorism. This holds of course for crime in general...

In fact, this belonging to the place was the very reason that this large scale, drag-net-based, familial searching could take place. It was determined that in this region of the Netherlands there was not much mobility and that people tend to stay put. Moreover, as indicated above, after finding the two Y-chromosomal DNA matches, genealogical research showed the way. The Dutch Central Bureau for Genealogy was approached to help search their data and construct the family trees. The two Y-chromosomal profiles represented two families with one common ancestor, a man called Jasper Jans, who was an innkeeper in 1748 and lived in the nearby village Westergeest. The investigating team then worked their way from this shared ancestor back into our times looking for relatives and determining not just their Y-chromosomal profile but also autosomal DNA profiles.¹³ And on November 14, 2012 a full match could be reported by the forensic geneticists to the investigating police team (Meulenbroek & Poley, 2014: 446).

Based on the account above I want to suggest that the coupling of sameness and *us-ness* entails three specific elements: the individual, the family and the place. In the case I discuss here, sameness racialized the community through a mobilization of markers, such as, whiteness, tradition and occupation, as well as rootedness, a nativism of sorts. While this version of sameness was racialized, it still allowed for individuality, humanness, or goodness and thus for space within the community.

Staying with the trouble: on sameness and race and the limits of going beyond

In this commentary we have encountered two different versions of sameness that have produced different versions of race. First, sameness was related to *otherness*, and the phenotypic othering of the unknown suspect. Therein, the coupling between sameness and othering produces a racialized category, one that subsumes differences and lumps people together by reducing them to one particular marker that is deemed relevant. In the second part of this commentary we have attended to another version of sameness; sameness was there coupled to *us-ness*. This configuration has also produced a racialized category, but one that leaves space for differences within the group. While belonging to a racialized category, there was space for *individuality* (a normal and social guy), for *family* (he is a family man and the child of a well-known family) and for tradition and *belonging to the place* contributing to the normality of the suspect (a farmer from here).

Related to this we can conclude that secondly, there are different machineries of sameness at work. There is a version of sameness that came along with the familial searching technology and produced a seemingly unmarked collective of us. But upon looking closely it actually produced a White Dutch, farming community. This version of sameness did not readily translate into individuals. It did not reduce all individuals within this collective to one characteristics, or keep mobilizing additional 'evidence' to understand or support "their" behavior. It was not generative of suspicion against all of them by lumping Dutch men together and assuming that they have a tendency for crime or a

¹³ To be sure, while the police did have all the identifying information about those who participated in the DNA research, the Forensic Institute, only received the registration numbers that accompanied the swabs. So this part of the process required a fair amount of communication back and forth between the investigative team and the forensic geneticists.

taste for raping and murdering young girls. Jasper S. was and is viewed as a singular case and his crime as that of one specific individual, with a specific biography.

By contrast, the version of sameness that was based on phenotypic othering, produced the excludables. This version was much more virulent and generative: the “phenotypes” translated into individuals who allegedly belonged to that group; and it kept on mobilizing support (cultural elements) as evidence for the link between the homicide and the phenotypically othered.¹⁴ Obviously, this virulent version of sameness was generative of racist violence against individuals that belonged to the group of excludables, leading to the eventual shutting down of the asylum seekers center and contributing to the emerging anti-Muslimism racism fueled by rightwing politicians such as Geert Wilder (e.g. de Koning, 2012). It is remarkable that while the violence was directed towards the asylum seekers their criminalization and unjust suspicion still looms in political and public debates about migration and the criminalization of migrants in the Netherlands (Van der Linde, 2019).

In her *Staying with Trouble*, Donna Haraway (2016: 1) explains this as follows:

In urgent times, many of us are tempted to address trouble in terms of making an imagined future safe, of stopping something from happening that looms in the future, of clearing away the present and the past in order to make futures for coming generations. Staying with the trouble does not require such a relationship to times called the future. In fact, staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present.

Being truly present is precisely about attending to troubling things in practices, about making space for their various manifestations and politics. Given its tainted histories (M'charek et al., 2020; Stocking, 1982) *race* is par excellence a trouble. Race as a word and concept should make us nervous. Making ourselves nervous about race is precisely what this special commentary section is aimed at. Being nervous about race, could lead to the conclusion that since it has done so much harm, we need to get rid of it as quickly as possible. My purpose here was to convince you that we do precisely the opposite. Being nervous about race should indeed make us wary of mobilizing race as a social classification, even if it is used as self-identification, a practice common to e.g. the US context but fairly unusual in continental Europe and parts of the world. For, as Ian Hacking (1999) has taught us, categories do not represent but make-up people, thus contributing to the reification of categories, such as race. At the same time being nervous about race should invite us to keep it into view of our studies and on the table of our conversations. Rather than moving beyond, as if race has done its work and we are done analyzing its manifestations, we might rather embrace Haraways' suggestion to stay with the trouble and to critically follow how this absent presence (M'charek et al., 2014) keeps manifesting itself in practices, what political work it does, how its manifestation here becomes something else there.

¹⁴ It is important to observe that sameness in forensics, is an important technology or an operator through which the profile of the suspect is shaped. Racializing the category of sameness and therewith the profile contributes to its value for criminal investigation. The category of *white* in the Dutch context was not of much value to solving the case, as it included too many individuals.

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Authors' contributions

AM is the sole contributor. AM is read and approved the final manuscript.

Authors' information

Amade M'charek is Professor of Anthropology of Science at the Department of Anthropology, University of Amsterdam, where she acts as the director of the research group Health, Care and the Body. M'charek is PI of the RaceFaceID project, an ERC-consolidator project on forensic identification and the making of face and race, and co-PI of the NWA project Pressing Matter: Ownership, Value and the Question of Colonial Heritage in Museums. Her work has centred on the ir/relevance of race in science and society focusing on genetics and forensic practice, exploring issues of post_coloniality, temporality and identity. Through her recent research on migrant death, she has developed an interest in forensic methods for studying (post)colonial relations, circulations and extractions.

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