RACISM AT THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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Magagement summary

Racism is a widespread phenomenon that in recent times has been given a more prominent place on the agenda, partly in response to the *Black Lives Matter* movement. This is also the case at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which commissioned an external independent research agency (Bureau Omlo) to conduct an exploratory, qualitative study of this issue, with a view to gaining insight into racism within the organisation. The study aimed to answer two questions: (i) According to ministry staff, to what extent does racism occur within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (including at the missions) and how does it manifest itself? (ii) How do staff believe that racism can be prevented and combated within the organisation?

Purpose of the study

In order to answer these questions, 33 individual in-depth interviews were conducted and four focus groups established, in which a total of 47 staff members participated. The individual interviews were conducted with people who have direct experience of racism within the ministry: bi-cultural staff members working in The Hague and at the missions, local employees of colour at the missions, and a number of white staff members. In the focus groups discussions were held with staff who, given the nature of their position, might have insight into racism in the workplace and potential signs of racism, or have specific expertise. This includes confidential advisers, HR staff, staff who fulfil roles relating to integrity policy and a safe and supportive working environment, and policy officers involved in diversity and inclusion.

Patterns of racism

The study makes clear that racism is a broad phenomenon which manifests itself in many different ways. It can be aggressive, direct, open and deliberate or subtle, indirect, hidden, unintentional or unconscious. Bi-cultural staff and local employees of colour experience different expressions of racism, including verbal abuse, derogatory treatment, cultural racism and all kinds of accusations and imputations. Staff also report being sometimes passed over, ignored and excluded. They experience racist jokes and low expectations. They experience that some of their white colleagues see them as being 'the ethnic and cultural other' and do not treat them as a fully fledged Dutch person or equal colleague. The emphasis on a person's ethnic and cultural background leads to people questioning their loyalty. Staff are also concerned about the way various ethnic groups are stigmatised in everyday conversation.

Given the many experiences of racism mentioned, it can be concluded that there are patterns of racism within the organisation. All of these patterns show that racism is a

problem that bi-cultural staff and local employees experience on a regular basis. Many respondents stated that racism is a structural problem.

Institutional racism

The conclusion that various patterns of racism are evident within the organisation and that many respondents see racism as a structural problem raised the question of whether institutional racism also exists at the ministry. It was concluded that this is indeed the case. The study identified various processes and mechanisms within the organisation and its organisational culture that create scope for racism and provide insufficient safeguards to prevent racism. This concerns unfair recruitment and advancement processes and unfair processes that lead to staff leaving the ministry. Strong social anti-discrimination standards, a well-functioning complaints procedure and an inclusive organisational culture are also lacking.

Institutional racism does not mean that racism occurs in every corner of the organisation and that all staff are engaged in it. Respondents said that, besides racism, they also experience pleasant relationships with colleagues and have had good experiences within certain teams. There are also differences between the various departments and missions. Nor does the existence of institutional racism mean that malicious intent is always involved. Some exclusionary mechanisms may be blind spots and may stem from, for example, reluctance to act and unconscious bias.

The conclusions regarding institutional racism relate primarily to unwritten, informal rules and the organisational culture. On the basis of this study we cannot draw any conclusions as to whether there are also formal, written rules that lead to unequal treatment of people of different ethnic backgrounds, skin colour and/or religion. Given that we did not examine formal policy, we do not know whether there is formal policy in place that deliberately and explicitly distinguishes between ethnic groups. No direct evidence of this has been found, but we cannot rule it out either.

Impact of racism

The findings are serious and give cause for concern, first and foremost because racism is harmful to the staff experiencing it. These experiences can lead to stress, negative emotions and reduced wellbeing. This can have a detrimental effect on their performance at work and trust in the organisation and colleagues. At the same time, many staff in this situation may also choose to work extra hard, be extra friendly, behave in an exemplary manner and adapt to the organisational culture. These types of overcompensation are taxing and require a great deal of additional energy. Moreover, the pressure they experience to conform to and assimilate into the organisational culture and the lack of advancement opportunities they observe increase the risk of the ministry losing well-performing staff in the future.

Secondly, racism is harmful to the ministry's work. The results show a clear discrepancy between the ministry's mission – working to create a just and sustainable world with opportunities, freedom and dignity for all – and everyday practice in the workplace. The ministry's credibility and reputation are at stake.

Recommendations

The recommendations are largely based on the solutions put forward by the respondents themselves. It should be emphasised that the recommendations below do not fully answer the question of how the organisation can effectively combat racism. Given that this research is an exploratory study, the recommendations provide an initial overview of potential appropriate measures. Below is a summary of the recommendations.

1. Take the signals identified in the study seriously

On the basis of the study's findings and the respondents' suggestions, it is important for the ministry to take the signals from the study seriously by acknowledging the problems and formulating specific action points in response. This is essential if the ministry is to restore trust among staff, tackle cynicism and dissatisfaction in the workplace and prevent staff from leaving the organisation. On multiple occasions staff members who had spoken openly with managers, confidential advisers and other staff about their experiences were disappointed with the organisation because of the lack of action.

An action point should be to ensure that the findings are made available and discussed within the organisation. A constructive dialogue in the form of reflection sessions is needed in order to figure out what the study means for the organisation. The ministry should involve those affected by racism in discussions, learn from their personal experiences and insights, and ask them to assist in formulating appropriate solutions. It is also advisable to formulate a set of specific actions or goals in the short term. This will allow the ministry's management to send out a strong message that it will not tolerate racism.

2. Actively promote non-discrimination as a social norm

According to the respondents, managers take too little corrective action or indeed no action at all when they learn about cases of racism. In fact, some managers and other colleagues have the tendency to deny and downplay experiences of racism. This undermines efforts to recognise the issues and set clear standards. It is important to the respondents for there to be consequences – such as warnings and sanctions – for staff who engage in racist behaviour, and for this policy to be enforced. Staff also consider it important for colleagues to intervene if they witness racist behaviour. Experience shows that this currently happens too little.

The above suggestions from respondents link in with the importance of having a strong social norm of non-discrimination in place and that this is actively propagated within the ministry. Research shows that setting a clear standard that racism will not be tolerated within the organisation can reduce the number of racist incidents among staff. Promoting this standard is not only a manager's responsibility. As indicated by the respondents, it is also important that witnesses intervene. This also contributes to the establishment of a social norm that can have a preventive effect. If staff realise that colleagues disapprove of such behaviour and that it is socially unacceptable, they are less likely to engage in racism (Broekroelofs & Felten, 2020; Crandall, Eshleman & O'Brien, 2002; Fermin, et al. 2021). In the long run, all of this will contribute to a cultural transformation with greater social safety, both for staff who experience racism and for witnesses, who will feel emboldened to speak out against it. At present racism is primarily considered to be a problem that minority groups need to find a way to deal with. By changing the culture it will come to be seen more and more as the responsibility of the dominant majority group. Management can encourage this process by developing policy aimed at activating those who witness racism.

3. Invest in training staff

Research shows that education and training aimed at enhancing professional skills is an important way to ensure fair processes and help prevent arbitrary and unequal treatment (Broekroelofs & Felten, 2020; Fermin, et al., 2021). It is therefore important to invest in civil service professionalism, something which the respondents also called for. One option could be organising training courses aimed at constructively dealing with conscious and unconscious bias, cultural sensitivity in the workplace and respectful treatment of bi-cultural and local employees. Another option is to provide master classes focusing on the significance and impact of racism and how both victims and witnesses of racist behaviour can respond to racism.

Although training is already being provided, staff see room for more improvements. For example, some respondents said that to ensure the insights that staff gain through training is applied satisfactorily in practice it is important not to limit training to just a few sessions. Otherwise it will not be possible to initiate an effective change process. This means that training courses on this subject must be given a permanent and prominent place in the range of courses on offer. Furthermore, respondents pointed out that because the current offering is voluntary staff who could play an important role in combating racism do not actually participate in the training that is available. Training courses should therefore be made more obligatory in nature.

4. Invest in making the reporting structures more professional

The study identified various problems in the reporting procedures that provide an important explanation as to why staff show little or no willingness to share experiences of

racism with confidential advisers, integrity coordinators, HR staff or inspectors. Respondents appreciate being able to share experiences with a professional who understands them and who has specific knowledge and expertise on such topics as racism, diversity and inclusion. In the respondents' view, to facilitate this staff need training and specific emphasis should be placed on knowledge and experience of diversity and inclusion when recruiting new staff.

The fact that there have been few complaints of racism is not a reason to be complaisant. On the contrary, it means that the reporting procedure should be made simpler and more accessible. Some staff pointed to a need for professional complaint handling. This means providing a listening ear without questioning a person's experiences, a guarantee that the information will be treated confidentially, establishing specific actions in response to an incident report, and providing feedback on the action taken in response to the report.

5. Invest in a more inclusive recruitment and selection policy

Respondents put forward various suggestions for ensuring fair recruitment and selection procedures and limiting the negative effects of bias. For example, actively recruiting talented bi-cultural people at universities, setting targets or quotas, ensuring greater diversity in recruitment committees and making it possible to apply for a job anonymously. It could also help to tailor the recruitment message to potential bi-cultural staff, acquire more knowledge of how bias affects job interviews, pay more attention to cultural sensitivity in recruitment and selection, establish a more standardised recruitment and selection procedure and use templates during job interviews to minimise the risk of bias. It is also important to train staff in conducting job interviews and in selecting candidates, with a specific focus on how to recognise and deal with their own prejudices.

The respondents stated that the problems are more serious when it comes to advancement. In their view, more diversity is urgently required in highly visible positions and better representation in the senior management and management teams to prevent staff from becoming disillusioned and leaving the ministry. Advancement of staff members is valuable as they can serve as role models for others. To strengthen equal opportunities, it was suggested that management programmes and mentor programmes be put in place at an early stage for talented bi-cultural staff. It was also indicated that it would be fairer if local employees were given more opportunities to join the management team at a mission and to advance within the organisation.

6. Work on building trust among local employees

Another suggestion is to repair the mistrust felt by local employees of colour as much as possible. Respondents indicated that the ministry should proactively approach missions to gauge the situation instead of waiting until they receive reports of racism. In other words, reach out to and invest in relationships with local employees. According to respondents it is

crucial to dispel the feeling that local employees are inferior and to acknowledge and show appreciation for the work that they do. It is also important to clearly explain the reasons for not inviting local employees to informal and formal events in certain cases. Finally, respondents said that it should be less easy to dismiss domestic staff.

7. Strengthen the organisation's learning capacity

There are various ways to strengthen the organisation's learning capacity in regard to promoting diversity and inclusion and combating racism. First of all, respondents believe it is important to always conduct exit interviews with staff leaving the organisation. In the case of bi-cultural and local employees, it is important to discuss to what extent experiences of racism have played a role in their decision to leave. Exit interviews not only provide insight into the reasons for departure, but they also provide an opportunity to receive feedback on how staff could be retained, as well as other recommendations that could help prevent and tackle racism. In addition to exit interviews, respondents called for trend analyses and monitoring reports that present statistics and trends concerning diversity in recruitment, advancement and departure. Respondents also expressed that any actions launched in the coming period should be evaluated.

Suggestions for a follow-up study

Finally, the following concrete suggestions were made for a follow-up study:

- Action research in which the outcomes of the current study are used to reflect with those involved on the implications and on the changes that need to be made.
- A study of how staff react when they witness racist behaviour and what they need to encourage them intervene (more frequently) and provide support to victims.
- A study of how managers deal with racism and what they need to better identify issues and provide appropriate support.
- A review of national and international literature exploring effective ways of combating racism.
- Research into other groups of staff who have experienced unequal treatment and bias, such as LGBTI people, those with a disability, and staff from different religious backgrounds (e.g. Jewish, Hindu and Christian).
- A quantitative study of experienced and observed patterns of racism.

1 Introduction

The State Department's mission is to help build on a just world with opportunities, freedom and dignity for all. In order to facilitate this, various measures have been taken, such as the international agreements with which they aim to combat any form of inequality. The ministry is also committed to human rights and development cooperation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) represents the Netherlands with approximately 150 embassies, consulates and other representations abroad (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

The ministry imposes similar standards on its own organization. In other words, in addition to the mission to be meaningful in the world, there is also a focus on a safe working environment for its own employees. For example, the ministry has seriously been aiming for an increase in diversity and inclusion (D&I) within the organization for several years now and show this by setting different goals. The "Policy Vision for Diversity and Inclusion 2021" notes that the usefulness and necessity of diversity and inclusion is recognized, but – at the same time - that there is still a long way to go about it (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). In addition, it has also been stated, that discrimination will not be tolerated, in the Government Code of Integrity and the ministry's code of conduct.

Racism on the agenda at the State Department

Partly as a result of the massive domestic and foreign attention paid to the Black Lives Matter movement, the subject of (institutional) racism has been placed more explicitly on the agenda. Based on the awareness that there are bottlenecks and room for improvement, the ministry has decided to conduct an exploratory study on racism within its own organization. According to the ministry, the research could potentially contribute to promoting diversity and inclusion.

Exploratory research on racism within the ministry

In the so-called Terms of Reference (ToR)[1] the ministry indicates that anti-racism is part of its ambitions in the area of diversity and inclusiveness. The Executive Council has expressed and committed to this research. Yet, the study has been conducted on behalf of the Secretary-General (SG) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Paul Huijts, and represented by Arthur Kibbelaar.

To gain insight into the way racism manifests itself within the organization, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has requested an independent research agency, named Bureau Omlo, to conduct an exploratory study. Bureau Omlo conducted this study with a team of different, experienced researches who were complementary to each other due to each one's field

[1] The Terms of Reference is added as an attachment.

of expertise. Their names are as following: Ahmet Kaya, Saloua Charif, Ewoud Butter, Mayke Kromhout, Kiran Ramlakhan and Jurriaan Omlo.

A widespread problem

In recent years, many studies have been conducted on racism. From these, a picture emerges that racism is a widespread and persistent problem within Dutch society. For example, there is discrimination in the workplace (De Jong, et al., 2021; Waldering et al., 2015) and in the labor market (cf. Andriessen, et al., 2015; 2020; Berg, et al., 2017; Thijssen, et al. 2019; Van Bon & Fiere, 2020). Interns experience discrimination in their search for an internship position (Andriessen, et al. 2014; Klooster, et al., 2016). Discrimination has also been demonstrated in health care (Nhass & Poerwoatmodjo, 2021; Kolste & Venderbos, 2022), in the housing market (Böcker, et al., 2019; Felten, et al., 2021; Hoogenbosch & Dibbits, 2019) and in entertainment venues (Andriessen, et al., 2020; Triesscheijn & Maris 2005). Several studies have further demonstrated ethnic profiling in the police force (cf. Andriessen, 2014; 2020, et al., Çankaya, 2012; Fra, 2009).

A study by the Social Cultural Planning Agency (SCP) shows that about half of Dutch people with a migration background have experienced discrimination. Yet, this accounts for almost two-thirds of Dutch people with a migration background if the experiences of those who doubted whether discrimination had occurred are also included (Andriessen, et al., 2020). In a more recent study, the SCP shows that 46 percent of Surinamese Dutch people and 43 percent of Caribbean Dutch people feel that discrimination against people with a migration background occurs (very) often. About one-third of Moroccan and Turkish Dutch people hold this opinion as well.

Researchers claim in their studies also that individuals with higher levels of education and relatively high participation rates experience more discrimination. Strong rooting is accompanied by high discomfort, especially among the second generation. The explanation is that even more participation and integration go hand in hand with greater exposure to exclusion, for example in the labor market (Dagevos, 2022).

Racism in governments

Racism has also been observed in governments. A recent study provided initial evidence of institutional racism in supervision and enforcement by BOAs[2] - in the municipality of Utrecht (Fermin, et al., 2022). The Dutch government also speaks of institutional racism at some departments of the Tax Authority, by having Dutch citizens with a migrant background more and strictly checked. Following the release included in the report 'Unprecedented Injustice' by the Parliamentary Inquiry Committee on Child Care Allowance (POK), it was decided to reinforce the approach to discrimination and racism in the central government. Combating discrimination and racism has been included as one

[2] BOAs are special investigative officers, who are civil servants with investigative authority and can detect certain offenses.

of the main ambitions of the central government and has therefore become part of the current coalition agreement. A National Coordinator against Discrimination and Racism (NCDR) has been appointed and a State Commission against Discrimination and Racism will investigate discrimination and racism in various sectors of society, including the government, in the upcoming years.

1.1 The definitions of racism

In Chapter 3, in particular, we elaborate specifically on the meaning of racism based on the respondents' experiences. In this introduction, we broadly cover the meaning of racism.

Legal approach to racism

Discrimination on grounds such as race, religion and belief is prohibited in the Netherlands, as stated in Article 1 of the Constitution. From a legal perspective, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination is also relevant. This convention was adopted by the United Nations in 1965. Racism is defined herein as:

> "Any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life."

Racism as a multi-headed monster

In addition to a legal approach to racism, much has been published in social sciences about (the meaning of) racism. In scientific literature, there is broad recognition of the idea that racism is a multi-headed monster. Thus, following many other scholars' findings on the definition and meaning of racism, we view racism as a broad phenomenon with diverse manifestations. For example, racism can be aggressive, direct, overt and conscious, but it can also be subtle, indirect, hidden, unintentional or unconscious.[3]

What all these manifestations have in common is that there is an intended or unintended legitimization of certain hierarchical relationships based on (a combination of) descent, external characteristics, culture and/or religion.[4] Racism assumes certain feelings and ideas about the superiority of the dominant majority group and the inferiority of various ethnic minority groups.

[3] See, for example (Essed, 2018; McConahay, 1986; Meertens & Pettigrew, 1997; Solózano & Huber, 2020; Sue, e.a., 2007; Waters, 1999; Williams, e.a., 2021).

[4] Unequal treatment on religious grounds is also a form of racism. We discuss this in more detail in Chapter 3.

Subtle forms are often not recognized as racism

Indirect and more subtle forms are often not recognized as racism. Racism usually only evokes associations with malicious and overt forms of hatred, aggression and abuse (Van den Broek, 2020). There is an assumption that racism is an extreme phenomenon that only a small group of people might be guilty of (Essed, 2018). An accusation of racism is perceived as serious and sometimes even violent. Partly because of this, there is often strong resistance to using the term 'racism'. Its use is merely accepted on an occasional basis. The allergy to using the word racism is also due to the positive and innocent self-image of white Dutch people (Ghorashi, 2015; Wekker, 2020).

Everyday racism and microaggressions

Failing to recognize indirect and subtle forms of racism has to do with the fixation on legally punishable practices or harsh forms of racism. Such an approach to racism is a too narrow perspective, because it ignores the stratification, complexity and diversity of people's experiences. In this respect, Essed (1984; 2018) writes about 'everyday racism' with which she refers to diverse forms of injustice that people of color experience in everyday interactions with white people. By emphasizing 'every day' Essed wants to highlight the persistent, routine and daily presence of various subtle forms of racism. The sum of everyday subtle indignities constantly accentuates one's 'otherness' and that one does not entirely belong to the dominant group (cf. Omlo, 2020).

International publications also associate everyday racism with the so-called microaggressions (Solózano & Huber, 2020; Sue, et al., 2007; Williams, et al., 2021). Microaggressions are subtle, everyday experiences of racism that are offensive and hurtful. Sue et al. (2007) distinguished nine negative biases about a person's intelligence or reliability, stigmatizing categories to microaggressions, which were expanded to 16 categories by Williams et al. (2021). Some examples are negative remarks about ethnic groups, being treated with less respect, being ignored, and racist jokes (cf. Omlo, 2020).

Institutional racism

In recent years, there has been an increasing focus on institutional racism in the Netherlands. This occurs when 'the processes, policies and rules (written and unwritten) of institutions lead to structural inequality between people of different backgrounds, skin colors or religions'. This involves two types of rules or processes: (1) 'rules or processes that explicitly distinguish and intend to create inequality, and (2) rules or processes (written or unwritten) that do not explicitly distinguish between groups, but in practice cause one group to be disadvantaged and another group to be advantaged' (Felten, et al., 2021, p. 7).

Racism as a system

Finally, several scholarly contributions emphasize racism as a system. The reasoning here is that racism constitutes a historical system or structure within which the majority group possesses social and institutional power and authority to perpetuate certain prejudices about minority ethnic groups and inequalities between groups. Racism is embedded in the everyday practices of a society and its institutions. In this system, white people in the Netherlands benefit from certain privileges over people of color. The fact that racism systematically favors white people and disadvantages people of color, by the way, does not mean that white people do not experience difficulties. They just do not experience the disadvantages of racism that do affect people of color (Diangelo, 2018; Essed, 1984; Roberts & Rizzo, 2021; Williams, et al.).

1.2 Ministry and third-party involvement

The official steering committee and reference group

An official steering committee and a reference group, both chaired by D&J Strategic Advisor (SADI) Arthur Kibbelaar, supported the study. The official steering committee, consisting of officials from various directorates within the State Department, advised and supported the researchers during the exploration. The steering committee mainly had a supporting function: ensuring that the study could be conducted and proceeded smoothly (identifying possible relevant officials to interview, providing (contact) information to the researchers, etc.). The steering committee and researchers met regularly.

The reference group consisted of external and internal members and was tasked with reflecting on the findings and recommendations. The reference group met twice with the researchers. In the first meeting, the draft report was discussed and provided with feedback. In a second meeting, they reflected on the recommendations. The reference group had an advisory role; the researchers were independent.

The reference group consisted of:

- Khadija Azoubai (Program Secretary Transition Team HDPO, Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
- Steven Collet (Ambassador for Business and Development Cooperation and Director DDE, Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
- Serena Does (Professor of social inequality and resilience at VU University Amsterdam & researcher at Verwey Jonker Institute)
- Astrid Elburg (Lecturer at VU University Amsterdam, trainer and organizational consultant Leadership, Ethics and Inclusion)
- Karwan Fatah-Black (Assistant professor and lecturer in colonial history at Leiden University)

- Kay Formanek (Speaker, coach, consultant and founder Kay Diversity and Performance BV.)
- Paul Scheffer (Professor of European Studies at Tilburg University and publicist for the NRC)
- Brechje Schwachofer (Head of Inspection, Signaling and Guidance at Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
- Hester Somsen (Deputy National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security and Director of Cybersecurity and Static Threats and former State Department employee).

Third-party advice

The researchers further asked several scientists for advice to critically contribute to the design, implementation, analysis and/or reporting. The following had a role in this: Christian Broer, Halleh Ghorashi, Annika Griese, Marleen van der Haar, Jolien Klok, Martijn de Koning, Peter Rensen and Ismintha Waldering.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all individuals who have made this research possible. In particular, we would like to thank all the employees who made the effort to share their experiences and perspectives with us in the interviews and focus groups. As researchers, we were impressed by their stories, which were regularly quite intense. Their willingness to allow themselves to be vulnerable by sharing unpleasant experiences and the emotions associated with them has been invaluable to this study in understanding how racism manifests itself in the workplace at the ministry.

1.3 Reading Guide

In the next chapter, we discuss the approach to the study, including the objective and research questions, the research methods used, the selection and recruitment of respondents, and the organization of the study. Chapters 3 and 4 form the empirical chapters. In chapter 3 we elaborate on what experiences respondents have with everyday racism. In doing so, we distinguish different forms of racism. Chapter 4 focuses on the question whether institutional racism does exist. In Chapter 5, we formulate key conclusions and recommendations.

2 Research approach

In this chapter, we describe the objective, research questions, research approach and research methods used. We also explain how the respondents were selected and recruited. We then describe the participants in the study. We conclude this chapter by explaining how we interpret the results of the study.

2.1 Objective and research questions

In the so-called Terms of Reference (ToR), the ministry linked several objectives and research questions to the exploration.

Objectives

The objective of the study is threefold:

1) Identify the various dimensions/characteristics of the racism issue as perceived within the State Department (and possibly before entering the Department)
2) Assess the perceived extent of the problem as perceived both at the department in The Hague and at the posts
3) Making recommendations to address the problem, reduce it and contribute to greater diversity, inclusion, etc.

Within the study there is room for the experiences of employees in The Hague as well as employees at embassies abroad. This research looks for patterns of racism in the workplace rather than focusing on the actions of individual employees.

Research question

Following these goals, two research questions were formulated:

- To what extent do employees believe there is racism within the State Department (including embassies) and in what ways is it manifested?

- According to employees, how can racism within the organization be prevented and combated?

The first question involves perceptions of, and experiences with racism. This can be based on personal experiences, as well as stories heard from colleagues or events they attended as bystanders. Experiences of racism can relate to several levels: individual experiences with a colleague, experiences with multiple colleagues, advancement opportunities,

organizational culture and formal procedures and practices. The question 'To what extent?' refers to how often respondents personally and their colleagues experience racism, as well as their assessment of whether racism is an everyday occurrence or incidental.

The question about recommendations and areas for improvement are largely based on respondents' own insights and ideas. We will supplement these recommendations based on the main findings of the survey. The recommendations are the first step in the search for appropriate interventions.

2.2 A qualitative research design

To gain a detailed understanding of the various forms of racism within the ministry, a qualitative research design is used. The research is not aimed at statistical generalization and understanding the numerical proportions in which certain experiences and perspectives occur. The goal of this qualitative research is to generalize substantively (Dinklo, 2006; Smaling, 2009; 2014). That is, it attempts to capture the total spectrum of different types of experiences of racism. Smaling (2009) refers to this approach as 'variation-covering representativeness'.

The extent of the problem

Statistical generalization and figures are therefore out of the question, but that does not mean that we cannot say anything about the extent of the problem based on this study. First, we ask the respondents themselves to make a rough estimate of the extent of the problem. We do not ask the respondents for figures, but rather to indicate the extent to which the problem is structural and every day or rather incidental and exceptional. Second, we also gain insight into the extent of the problem by looking for patterns. This is the case, for example, when certain forms of exclusion are experienced regularly by a person. Especially for employees who have been working there for a long time. They might have been regularly confronted with specific forms of racism. We also ask respondents about the experiences of colleagues.[5] If there are similarities in all those experiences, we can also speak of patterns.

[5] In this regard, Van Erp et al. (2012) note that people develop more such generic experiential knowledge once they exchange reflections on their personal experiences with others with similar experiences. In the research, it became clear that several respondents also actually discuss their experiences regularly with other aggrieved people.

Power of qualitative research

The strength of qualitative research is that it can offer insight into what experiences and feelings people have (cf. Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Because of its level of detail and depth, it also offers opportunities to detect patterns. Qualitative research is also suitable for identifying mechanisms and processes that can explain the patterns found.

2.3 Interviews and focus groups

Since racism can occur in a variety of situations, it is not possible for researchers to observe them all. It is more beneficial to give people the opportunity to tell others about it in detail (Essed, 2018). This is partly the reason why we have chosen to conduct individual in-depth interviews and group interviews within focus groups among employees.

Online and offline (group)interviews

In the interviews, we provided ample space for employees to share their experiences, perspectives and feelings. A semi-structured questionnaire was used. Appropriate time was allotted for the interviews. Most of the interviews lasted an hour and a half. There were some short interviews, but there were also particularly relatively long interviews. For example, there was one 4.5-hour interview, one 4-hour interview and one 3-hour interview.

Most interviews were conducted online, but a few were conducted offline within the ministry itself or elsewhere. Two focus groups were interviewed offline and two online. The two online focus groups took place with staff working at different embassies abroad, hence a physical meeting was not an option.

Gaining trust from respondents

Some effort was made in gaining respondents' trust since racism can be a moving and hard topic to talk about. The researchers as well as members of the steering committee conducted short interviews with respondents to build trust and allow people to ask questions. It was explained that the interview will be processed anonymously and therefore no names will be mentioned in the report. Agreements were also made on the possible use of their quotes and thereby, we emphasized the possibility to agree or disagree with using any of their quotes. This helped some respondents to participate in the study despite earlier misgivings.

Often willingness to participate in the research

Almost everyone we approached participated in the study. One intended respondent dropped out due to personal circumstances. Another employee indicated that it takes too much energy to talk about the subject and would therefore be too taxing. Yet another employee indicated that he would never participate in surveys for reasons of principle. Furthermore, some employees were approached by colleagues without any results.

Limiting traceability

Respondents' background characteristics are not mentioned or mentioned as little as possible to avoid traceability. Without falling short to the content, certain unimportant details are sometimes adjusted to limit the traceability of stories. This was done especially for those respondents who attached importance to this. References to specific directorates, embassies and individuals have been omitted. References to employees in certain positions have also been phrased more generally where possible. If it is important for context or if there are striking differences between bi-cultural employees and locally hired employees, we will explicitly indicate whether a statement came from a locally hired employee, a bi-cultural employee in The Hague or at the embassy. In addition, we will sometimes indicate if certain statements were made by white employees.

Incidentally, this study did not examine whether certain experiences are associated with specific continents, countries or directorates. That is beyond the scope of this study. Moreover, the study is also too small-scale to make substantiated statements about this. It is also complicated by the importance of anonymity and traceability.

2.4 Selection of respondents

The purposive sampling strategy was used to select respondents. This strategy involves seeking respondents who relate to the research topic in a relevant way.

Involve employees with experiential knowledge

For this research, the purposive sampling strategy means that it is essential to speak to people who have lived experiential knowledge in order to gain an in-depth understanding of various manifestations of racism. This method implies that the researchers are not interested in the opinions of all kinds of random employees. Indeed, not every employee is equally qualified to speak about racism (Van Selm, 2007). White people are usually less able to spot the problem, recognize it, and they are far from always aware that racism exists.

Conversely, victims of racism develop a keen understanding of exclusionary mechanisms (Essed, 2018). They possess the so-called experiential knowledge and are therefore well placed to recount racist experiences within the organization (cf. Keuzenkamp, 2017; Omlo, 2020). For this reason, for the individual interviews, we chose to look for employees who have experienced racism in contact with colleagues or in written and unwritten rules.

Engage employees with expertise through their positions

Employees were not randomly selected for the focus groups. As in the interviews, we chose to select employees who had experienced racism. In addition, we primarily recruited people who, because of the nature of their jobs, might have insight into racism in the workplace or have insight into possible signs or have specific expertise. Such as employees who have a specific role within the ministry, for example confidential advisors, HR staff, employees on integrity and a safe work environment and policy officials who deal with diversity and inclusion or have done so in the past. In addition, employees were selected who have worked at various embassies for years and therefore may have a good understanding of the issues.

2.5 Recruitment of respondents

Snowball method and convenience sampling method

Some of the respondents were recruited through the so-called snowball method. This means that the researchers asked interviewed employees to suggest new respondents. Another part we recruited using the convenience sampling method (Hess-Biber & Leavy, 2006). That is, respondents were recruited through various available channels. For example, we used the support opportunities provided by the ministry through members of the steering committee.[6] Based on instructions from the researchers, the members helped towards finding suitable candidates. In addition, business contacts and acquaintances of the researchers themselves were used. The researchers discussed the study confidentially with key individuals who have large networks, including networks at the State Department. They also searched for collaborators online through social media. As a result, recruitment was not only from within but also from outside.

2.6 Description of participants

A total of 33 individual in-depth interviews were conducted.[7] We ended up interviewing more people than planned because some respondents volunteered themselves for an interview. In addition, we received more people than expected through the snowball method. We could have talked to even more people but had to decline some interviews due to the time constraints of the study. In addition to the individual interviews, four focus groups (group interviews) were conducted. Through the focus groups, a total of 47 employees were interviewed.

[6] The steering committee is an official working group established for the research for the purpose of strategic reflection, coordination and providing support to the researchers.

[7] Initially 22 interviews were planned.

Varying background characteristics

As indicated, we sought people who had experienced racism. To achieve variation-wide representativeness, the recruitment process focused on looking for employees with possibly different types of experiences of racism. We did this by varying on background characteristics that might affect the type of experience. For example, we recruited people at embassies as well as those working in The Hague.

We approached locally hired and expatriate staff from embassies in different continents: Africa, Asia, Europe, North America and South America. In The Hague, we interviewed people working in various policy departments.

Further variation was based on gender, job type, age and number of years in service. In addition, employees of diverse ethnic backgrounds were interviewed. In the final phase of the study, some white employees were also interviewed, as they appeared to have relevant expertise. Several white employees were also interviewed in the focus groups.

Furthermore, we were able to speak with people who have not worked for the ministry for very long to people who have worked there for a very long time. We also interviewed some people who applied for jobs and did not get in.[8] Finally, we interviewed some people who have worked for the organization for years but have since left.

The vast majority of the experiences recorded are from recent years. Because we also spoke to employees who worked for the ministry for many years, some experiences took place more than a decade ago. These experiences are also relevant and have been given a place in the research report. The reason is that such experiences can tell something about the continuity of racism over a longer period of time and thus give an indication of whether the organization has succeeded in making improvements. Moreover, these experiences were put forward by the respondents for a reason. They are meaningful experiences for them that continue to influence how they experience the ministry in the present.

Bi-cultural and white employees

In recent years in Dutch literature the pair of terms 'people with and without migration background' is being used.[9] Applying this terminology to employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would create a lot of confusion. Referring to white employees as 'employees without a migration background' does not fit well because many employees often migrate

[8] These interviews primarily discussed experiences with (multiple) application procedures at the ministry.
[9] People with an immigrant background is the terminology that the Scientific Council for Government Policy has proposed because of the criticism of the (policy) category of 'allochtoon' (Bovens, e.a., 2016)

from embassy to embassy. Conversely, bi-cultural employees can also be found who have only ever worked in The Hague.

In this report, we distinguish bi-cultural and white employees partly because these are the terms most often used by respondents themselves to distinguish between these two 'groups' of employees. This does not mean that these categories are without problems. Overall, terms such as bi-cultural, migrant background and immigrant emphasize being a migrant. In fact, the term 'allochtoon' literally means 'not of this soil'. It is quite problematic to continue considering large groups of Dutch people who were born and raised here as a foreign other or as a migrant, even if they themselves have never migrated (cf. Schinkel, 2008). The use of such categories contributes to overestimating the differences between people and underestimating similarities. Furthermore, there is also some overlap in terminology, as white people can also be bi-cultural, although this depends on the exact definition of such terms. It is an unusual pair of terms because they are not each other's opposites.

Locally hired and deployed employees

We refer to staff working at embassies in a country where they themselves were born and raised as locally hired staff. Locally hired staff is a legal category and thus of a different order than the term "bi-cultural employee." It is important to emphasize that in this study we interviewed locally hired employees of color.[10] For the sake of readability, we will not keep repeating the addition 'of color'. Employees who work on a temporary basis for a particular embassy and are deployed from the Netherlands are described as (bi-cultural) deployed employees.

2.7 Interpretation of the results

As indicated earlier, employees' experiences and perspectives are central to this study. It concerns events and interactions with white colleagues that they themselves have experienced as racist. Sometimes there is doubt and uncertainty among respondents about how to interpret an incident. They are then not sure whether an unfair treatment has to do with their background or whether there are other causes. We will pay attention to this in the report as well.

Sometimes reluctance to talk about racism

Uncertainty and doubt sometimes lead to reluctance to use the term racism. Research shows that this is a common reaction to racism (Verkuyten, 2003; Omlo, 2020). There are several explanations for this. First, it has to do with the fact that many victims also associate racism with conscious and malicious forms of exclusion. In addition, Verkuyten (2003) explains that it is psychologically taxing to acknowledge racism because it can undermine

[10] Locally hired staff also includes white employees.

a sense of personal control. There is also a social burden, as racism is quickly perceived as a major accusation for both victim and perpetrator. There is a fear that this can disrupt social relationships. Within an organizational context, this mechanism is perhaps even more pronounced, as employees are condemned to each other in the workplace and depend on each other. In addition, employees may also fear the personal consequences that statements about racism may have for them in the workplace. This makes them prefer to avoid confrontations. Finally, due to the political-social climate, there is a taboo on victimization, making people less likely to speak up about experiences of racism (cf. Charkaoui, 2019; Omlo, 2020; 2011).

Sometimes respondents do dare to speak about experiences in which they are excluded because of their origin, culture, skin color and/or religion, but because of (a combination) of the above reasons, they do not label every experience as racism. This mechanism may cause respondents to underestimate the issue of racism. If respondents express doubts about certain events, that is not a reason for us to discount such experiences and to not classify them as racist. As pointed out in a report by the Social and Cultural Planning Office, it is quite possible that people do not perceive an experience as racist, while from a social science perspective, racism may be present (Andriessen, et al., 2014). Therefore, in this study, on the one hand, we rely on the way employees themselves describe experiences. On the other hand, we rely on various scientific contributions, both domestic and from abroad. In Chapters 3 and 4, we will therefore also regularly refer to scientific literature when describing different forms of racism.

In the descriptions of racism in this report, it is usually clear why racism exists. In some examples, it is less clear. In such cases, for example, while it is clear that injustice is occurring, it is not clear whether employees are experiencing it because of their origin, culture, skin color and/or religion. There are several reasons for this. In a limited number of cases, the context has been omitted to avoid traceability. In other cases, an experience is just part of a respondent's broader story in which an aggregate of experiences with specific colleagues are discussed. It is the accumulation of these experiences and the perception that white colleagues have little or no exposure to them that makes employees experience racism and unequal treatment. Also for the sake of readability, it is not desirable to elaborate on each example at length.

Exclusion on other grounds

Several times, examples of exclusion based on other grounds, such as gender or sexual preference, were also mentioned. Since this study focuses on racism, such experiences have been excluded. Reflections and experiences that tell something about the broader organizational culture have otherwise been included.

3 Racism in the workplace

In this chapter, we describe bi-cultural and locally hired employees' experiences of racism in their interactions with colleagues in the workplace in The Hague and at various embassies. In the analysis of the interviews, we have hereby looked for patterns, that is, experiences that recur regularly in respondents' stories. These are experiences that several respondents shared. These may be personal experiences, but they may also be experiences that respondents observed or heard from colleagues. We further reflect on the impact of racism and the perceived extent of racism.

3.1 Using verbal aggression

To begin with, respondents experience verbal aggression because of their origin, skin color, culture and/or religion. For example, they report racial slurs. Typically, respondents are not personally scolded, but in their presence, others are spoken of in this way. For example, several employees reported that people have been referred to several times because of their skin color as 'monkeys', 'bokitos', 'Negroes' and 'Black Pete.' African countries have been described by one staff member as 'monkey countries.' These swear words have been uttered within several directorates. That it also occurs within directorates that focus on development cooperation in African countries is called ironic by one respondent. Especially in such a work environment, according to this respondent, it is very important for employees to be aware of the language they express.

Because of slavery and colonial oppression, the n-word is a historically charged swear word that is considered highly offensive by many people in the Netherlands and abroad. Yet this awareness does not seem to be present among all employees. For example, one respondent relates that a colleague consciously uses the word and believes that he can and may use it. A locally hired employee indicates that it is 'very common' for Dutch people to use the term:

> *"People talk about Negroes. Sometimes I hear remarks that are very common in the Netherlands, but in our country you can't do that. For example: 'there's a very big Negroe over there'. Of course then the person is going to feel attacked. When we sit at the lunch table, you hear things like that. People don't realize that someone else is listening and that their conversation is bad. There is no filter. Those persons may not speak Dutch, but they understand."*

The n-word and the other racist terms mentioned are sometimes used in jest, according to one respondent. Employees are then not consciously out to hurt others. It does show that there seems to be a certain lack of sensitivity to the impact such language can have on people and that it has an exclusionary effect. The innocence with which the word is used by some white employees is also evident in the quote below. In this case, the word is associated with a compliment and may also be well-intentioned. At the same time, the comment also betrays a racist bias against groups and the person is apparently surprised that the other person deviates from the dominant image.

> *"One time a colleague said to me, "You can play table shuffleboard well for a Negro."*

Vulgar and aggressive language

Verbal aggression can take different forms. In addition to messages intended by the sender to be primarily joking, examples were cited where the racist language was very vulgar and serious in tone. For example, during a meeting, it was noted by a high-ranking employee that support for the refugee policy is limited by, among other things, the behavior of 'Cunt Moroccans'.[11] At another directorate, a group of employees consistently used the term "monkeys" to describe and ridicule certain population groups. There were also examples of inferior characteristics being attributed to population groups, such as 'dirty black man' and 'stinking people with headscarves'.

An example was cited where aggressive language was used at a consulate by a deployed employee toward Asians.

> *"There have been comments made by a colleague. She has the door in the office open, so we hear everything. For example, she says, 'you should club those Asians back in their coop. Hang them from the highest tree, they should know their place. The next one I come across, I'll smack him in the mouth.' (...) I can well understand that local employees who speak a fair bit of Dutch do feel directly addressed."*

Remarkably, this employee apparently felt comfortable enough to leave the door open, knowing that others could be listening in. Other respondents - both locally hired and (former) deployed employees - also recounted speaking in a "very aggressive tone" to locally hired employees, often culminating in shouting and in front of others. The tone is very different than when speaking to deployed colleagues.

[11] 'Kutmarokkanen' in Dutch is a derogatory term meant to insult Moroccans

Employees in The Hague indicated that they did not want to share a plane with women wearing headscarves. One respondent said he once had a colleague with far-right and "overtly racist views." Another respondent experienced harassment. Her supervisor treated her in a verbally aggressive manner. She spoke of "abusive language," "raging" and "ranting." She was called out as "weak and feeble." She noticed that her ethnicity and cultural background played a role in this.

Certain groups are not welcome in the Netherlands

Verbal aggression can also manifest itself in comments indicating that certain groups are not welcome in the Netherlands. For example, one employee has said that "we should have left them in Africa." Another staff member also makes it clear that refugees do not belong in the Netherlands, calling it "ridiculous" that we allow so many people from Afghanistan into the Netherlands. This is undesirable, according to this staff member. After an employee spoke about a family member in the Netherlands, a manager remarked: "we don't want that kind of people in the Netherlands." Respondents find it remarkable that employees feel comfortable making these statements and that it is also possible:

> *"When people talk about migrants, they talk about ferrying and sending migrants back. There is a culture in which people feel comfortable making these kinds of statements. Sometimes even in front of colleagues with a migrant background."*

3.2 Denigrating treatment

In addition to verbal aggression, respondents experience derogatory and inferior treatment allegedly stemming from a sense of superiority. They speak of a belittling, condescending and/or rude way of communicating. Employees sometimes experience contempt in this regard. Respectful and equal treatment is lacking.

Lack of respectful treatment of domestic workers

Several staff members who have worked at various embassies in the past, expand in particular on the treatment of domestic staff working in ambassadors' homes. Sometimes the complaints relate to partners of ministry employees. Those partners manage the in-house staff. It appears that sometimes they are not treated well. In this regard, one respondent indicated that domestic staff was 'snapped at'. These people were not taken seriously and were not treated with respect.

Patronizing treatment of locally hired staff at embassies

Several locally hired employees working at the embassy also had negative experiences. For example, one locally hired employee heard that deployed employees said to each

other that all the "dirty work" can be left to Mexicans. Another experience is that a deployed employee spoke disparagingly about local food in front of locally hired employees whom he knows eat it. A locally hired employee feels that deployed employees act as if they own the embassy because they are 'Dutch'. Locally hired employees, on the other hand, would be considered "guests." Some employees convey that they are "better" and that the locally hired employees are there to "serve them." They consider the locally hired employees to be inferior.

Several respondents pointed to ambassadors expecting locally hired staff to stand up when they enter the room, while that is not required of deployed staff. At another embassy, the ambassador knocks on the wall when they need something from locally hired staff. A deployed staff member noticed this and found it remarkable that the ambassador neglected to politely ask for his requests. An employee who has been deployed to several embassies in the past has also witnessed the belittling attitude and tells the following about it:

> *"The treatment is sometimes rude and belittling. If people don't do something quite the way you're used to, they react in a very belittling way and get very upset. I've seen all that happen. They behave in a way they wouldn't towards a white colleague."*

Denigrating treatment of bi-cultural employees

Bi-cultural staff also experience derogatory treatment at various times. One example mentioned relates to the ministry's diplomacy class. Once, when more bi-cultural employees took part in the class than in other years, it was quickly dubbed the "immigrant class." There is a derogatory undertone in that, according to one respondent, as if the selected candidates are all "excuse immigrants" and were only hired to meet targets. Another mentioned that she felt that certain colleagues did not take her seriously enough and did not consider her "full." In this regard, one respondent mentioned that colleagues are sometimes ridiculed by imitating their accents. Another employee also mentioned that she felt she was not taken seriously by her supervisor because she was "belittled" and treated like a "little child."

3.3 Condemning of cultures

Staff in The Hague share experiences in which the culture of different ethnic groups is stigmatized and condemned. For example, specific cultures are associated with "slackers" and 'criminals'. Inappropriate comments are regularly made and it often has a strong generalizing character.

Several white employees speak of "backward cultures that need to be pulled into modernity." One respondent called it very disappointing that diplomats in particular could not take a more neutral and subtle stance. She concluded that dialogue between "civilizations" in an international context is very complex if dialogue *about* civilizations already fails internally.

Similar patterns also occur at embassies. Respondents cite examples in which certain groups are described as "very lazy", "untrustworthy" and "stupid."

Sometimes the Dutch culture is described in positive terms as "open" and "transparent," while the culture of the other is problematized. Employees from certain other cultural backgrounds are said to be "introverted", "subdued", "quiet" and "afraid to speak out."

Islamophobia

A striking number of examples are cited where Muslims and their Islamic practices are problematized.[12] One respondent was shocked when she noticed that all the negative views about Islam in the public debate at the ministry also resonated. The underlying message according to several respondents is that their colleagues believe they are not as modern and integrated because they are Muslim. Islam is not associated with people who are highly educated, but associated with a certain "irrationality", "underdevelopment" and "backwardness." The idea is that Muslims are "out of their mind" and "weird."

In line with this, fasting during Ramadan is considered unnecessary and strange, not drinking alcohol is said to be old-fashioned, and not eating pork was referred to as "long outdated" and "long overdue." Colleagues also react with surprise when they hear that an employee prays five times a day, does not drink alcohol and fasts. Sometimes white colleagues also give unsolicited advice by noting that fasting is unhealthy. The quote below shows a Muslim employee in The Hague being asked not to fast:

> *"The first time I started fasting at Foreign Affairs I got comments. That's unhealthy. Or: 'how strange, we thought you were so well integrated. Apparently, you're not.' I was also asked to stop fasting a few times. I could not comprehend that."*

The headscarf is problematized in several ways. The negative comments some women receive creates an uncomfortable and unsafe work environment. One day when an employee decided to wear a headscarf, a colleague in a leadership position came

[12] Islamophobia is also a form of racism (see De Koning, 2014; Van de Valk, 2017). For example, De Koning explains that based on fears, stereotypical images and doomsday scenarios, "the other" is imagined as a threat and that Muslims are spoken about as inferior.

stomping into the room. These observations are mostly from employees who are not Muslim and women without headscarves.

Sometimes, out of the blue, people are asked questions about their religious identity that make them feel they have to justify themselves. For example, an employee gets asked if he believes that a woman is allowed to be an imam, or that his own wife is allowed to work, and what he would think if his child was gay. These kinds of questions frustrate him because they insinuate certain things. Another respondent experiences almost having to answer for perceived inconsistent behavior. Non-Muslim colleagues pointed out to her that she dressed secularly. They found that peculiar for someone who is "so practicing." In their experience, a practicing, "correct" Muslim woman is supposed to wear a headscarf. Anyone who deviates from this is secular in this reasoning. Space for making individual choices are under pressure because of this.

Condemning culture and/or religion sometimes takes a mocking form. One respondent recounted how a colleague wished everyone a happy new year, except for the respondent herself. She was asked if he would be allowed to say Happy New Year or if this would cause his head to be "cut off."

Culture as an explanatory factor

The focus on culture and religion sometimes makes employees fail to see the individual. Implicitly, they seem to assume that their colleagues' choices and behaviors can be explained on the basis of their cultural and religious backgrounds. In such a way that they might think that they are perceiving certain behavior based on cultural stereotypes while bi-cultural employees do not recognize themselves in it at all. Or that white employees think their colleague is biased because of his or her ethnic or religious background. Because they are viewed through religious or ethnic glasses. The fact that they have certain expertise and knowledge is overlooked. To avoid being accused of bias, some colleagues engage in 'self-censorship'. They feel that there is no safe working environment to hold certain political views.

Cultural racism

In academic literature, the above patterns are also described as cultural racism. It is not explicitly about external characteristics and origin, but the different culture of the other is what leads the most to unequal treatment and stereotypical statements. Exclusion takes place on the basis of perceived cultural differences (cf. Blokland & Hondius, 2003; Gilroy, 1987; Ghorashi, 2006; Gowricharn, 2000). According to Barker (1981), Essed (2018) and Witte (2010), this is also a form of racism because 'culture' is mostly assumed based on external characteristics, such as skin color, ancestry and nationality. The culture of the other deviates from the norm and is condemned and disqualified as primitive, underdeveloped and inferior. The other person's cultural identity is characterized as

something negative and as something to be ashamed of (Williams, et al., 2021). Culture is additionally used as an explanatory factor for certain behaviors (Schinkel, 2008).

3.4 Blaming and suspecting

A common stigmatizing and/or discriminatory experience is that people are accused or suspected based on their ethnicity or skin color (cf. Omlo, 2020; Williams, et al., 2021). In the interviews, it became clear that bi-cultural and locally hired employees are accused of many different aspects.

Allegations of criminal, political 'wrong' and terrorist ties

Sometimes, for example, employees are accused of criminal, politically 'wrong' or terrorist affiliations. For example, they are associated with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Gülen movement. For example, one employee was asked during a job interview whether he had ties to the Gülen movement. He wonders if this question was also asked to other candidates.

One respondent also experienced an assumption that she herself, her family or someone close to her must have been behind bars at some point. When the respondent denied this, the reaction was one of surprise.

In other cases, rather than personal accusations, populations are accused of criminal behavior. Another respondent recollects that his supervisor asked if the organization 'did a background check' on him. This question had also an insinuation, the respondent called the question 'rather racially charged'.

Accusations of dangerous or radical views

Accusations of dangerous or radical views also occur. One respondent said that he was viewed and treated differently by high-ranking co-workers because of having a longer beard. At the same time, he noticed that when a white colleague grew a longer beard, colleagues actually thought it was 'awesome' and 'hip'. This employee, therefore, concluded that it makes a substantial difference who the one is that is having a beard. In his case, it seemed to suggest radicalization. Another says that colleagues ask questions about Islam intended to find out how fanatically the religion is lived out.

Much mentioned is that after an attack, Muslim employees are asked what they think about it. Often they have to condemn attacks to prove their innocence. Colleagues want to know if they approve of terror. Several white non-Muslim colleagues also recognize this pattern. For example, a participant in a focus group noted that 'after an attack all of Islamic Foreign Affairs has to answer for being against it'. For Muslim employees, it is a great

disappointment to be made suspect by colleagues in this way. An employee with an Islamic background working in The Hague says the following about it:

> *"After the Paris attacks, there was a sad mood in the office. I was sitting at a table in an island office. It was really quiet. I'm just starting up. A colleague asks me: I'm going to ask you anyway. What do you think about these attacks? There is a really nasty undertone in it that insinuates that I have a different opinion than my white colleagues. Then you just feel, there's a bias in there. Whether it's conscious or unconscious I don't know. They are accusations. I feel like you are constantly 1-0 behind and have to prove yourself all the time. That you have to say out loud that you are not like that group of terrorists. That's so exhausting. You hear it everywhere in society, what do you think, but you don't expect it from colleagues with whom you work very intensively. You have the idea that you know each other well and then still they ask such a question."*

Another concrete experience that caused a sense of unease is from a woman who, on one of her first working days in The Hague, had left her bag at the door next to the management that dealt with terrorism and threats. When she returned, four men looked very worriedly at that bag. She received a "firm slap on the wrist" because "especially someone like her has to be careful with that." Although this respondent understood the context because there were tensions at the time, she also thought the reaction was over the top and embarrassing.

Allegation of espionage

A bi-cultural deployed employee informs investigators in an anonymous e-mail - through a colleague - that he was suddenly denied access to his own documents. The reason was that he was deemed "not Dutch enough" by a new colleague and therefore might be a spy. Another employee also tells how she was mistaken for a spy by colleagues in The Hague. This was expressed openly. It was a reason for several employees to withhold that colleague from certain information.

Allegation of lack of integrity

Other accusations experienced by employees relate to a lack of integrity. In front of colleagues, Moroccan-Dutch employees in The Hague were asked if they leaked information to Morocco. It was especially painful because this was not asked of other colleagues. In addition, as another respondent indicated, it is a 'heavy accusation'.

A staff member indicates that there is a fear at an embassy that locally hired staff will leak sensitive information. He calls such mistrust discrimination. The employee states that "if there is no trust, then you should not hire people." Furthermore, respondents note that locally

hired employees are accused of laziness because they would not work full hours and would abuse Ramadan to avoid working.

Accusation of theft

Distrust is additionally reflected in accusations of theft. At one embassy, a locally hired employee was accused of this by a colleague. Although the colleague had recovered her lost item, she never apologized for her wrongful accusation. Disappointing for the respondent was also that the supervisor did not intervene by addressing this employee about it. It caused the respondent a lot of stress because her reputation was at stake. Another respondent recounted how there was a tendency at the embassy to treat locally hired employees as suspects. For example, close attention was paid to ensuring that cutlery was not taken home. A staff member counted the cutlery to verify this.

Allegation of fraud

It can also happen that employees' partners are accused. For example, a deployed employee recounts an example of a partner who constantly had to prove his innocence. Partners receive benefits as compensation for loss of income. However, the condition is that the partner does not travel abroad for several months a year and must live at the place of employment for a certain period of time. A co-worker filed a report that included a suspicion that her partner did not comply with the condition. Since then, the co-worker has had to report to the ministry every few weeks and provide her husband's passport showing entry and exit stamps. She had to "prove each time that her husband was not fraudulent." The employee in question felt it was unfair that she was the only one at the embassy to whom this was requested. She also asked questions about this but never received an answer. She thinks it is because of her origins.

Accusation of undeserved success and unfairly obtained positions within the organization

What bi-cultural employees encounter even more is the accusation that their position within the organization was obtained unfairly, that is, not on the basis of good performance, but because of their ethnic background. It is an accusation of undeserved success, positive discrimination and that people owe their jobs only to diversity policies and pressure to meet certain targets. In doing so, employees question the abilities and professionalism of their bi-cultural colleagues.

For example, when one employee was promoted, a high-ranking colleague suggested that he owed it to his ethnicity. Another employee experiences that some white colleagues have assumed she got a position because she is visibly bi-cultural. She has received several comments about this. One respondent said that she was told that she had an "edge as a woman of immigrant descent" and that for people like her "a red carpet was being laid out." She herself had experienced just the opposite, as she had often been dealt with harshly by her manager and her ethnicity had been a reason to

make her life difficult. Another respondent also explained that the accusation that bi-cultural employees are favored is far from accurate:

> *"I was told: you are probably going to make it, because you have a double back number. I didn't understand it at all. I thought they were referring to soccer, so I asked very naively what do you mean? Well, you're female and an immigrant, so that's fine. A staff member from human resources said to me: it's too bad you're not also a lesbian or disabled because then you would have a few other checkmarks. I was like, okay, what's this all about? They also look at me differently because I am Moroccan and therefore treated differently. When in fact I have to try four times as hard to show that I am good."*

The accusation of undeserved success of bi-cultural employees is (implicitly) accompanied by the message that white employees are believed to be treated unfairly and disadvantaged. In the literature, this is also seen as a racist microaggression and referred to as "reverse-racism hostility (Williams, et al., 2021). According to these authors, it is accompanied by feelings of jealousy and hostility. This sometimes occurs in the ministry as well. For example, when an employee was given a great new position, she noticed that it was not awarded to her and that several colleagues "couldn't take it." Another relates that comments are sometimes made that the enrollment and career advancement of bi-cultural employees "comes at the expense of white young men." Finally, one respondent indicated that a colleague saw the arrival of bi-cultural employees as a threat to the incumbent elite within the organization.

Allegation of visa abuse

An employee who worked at an embassy in the past relates an experience of a locally hired employee who was denied a visa because there was a fear that the person would flee and disappear off the radar. Here there seems to be a certain distrust toward a locally hired employee. A locally hired employee also explains that she actually feels distrust:

> *"I was going to The Hague and I wanted to take my husband and children with me. When I applied for a visa, at first the response was very enthusiastic. However, later I was told that my family was not allowed to come with me. This signaled to me that they are not welcome and that they do not trust us. They think I come to The Hague to work in order to get my family permanently in the Netherlands. These kinds of comments are frustrating. If I had wanted to, I could have done it a long time ago. This kind of policy sends a very nasty message."*

3.5 Misplaced jokes and harassment

Racism can also be expressed in the form of stigmatizing jokes (cf. Omlo, 2020; Williams, et al., 2021; Wekker, 2020). One respondent called jokes a form of provocation. Several respondents feel in certain situations that humor functions as a kind of shield behind which people can hide to discriminate. Or as one respondent put it, "humor is a disguised way to convey certain messages. There is a grain of truth in every joke. " That also makes it difficult to counter it.

The seriousness of a joke depends on the context

It is not that humor is necessarily hurtful and racist. For example, if there is a good relationship with the colleague making a joke, it is different. Then there is "no harm" in it. One respondent stated that he can sense well whether something is appropriate and whether or not it is done with malicious intent. As soon as humor takes misplaced forms, a joke degenerates into bullying and excluding people. It often involves using negative stereotypes about ethnic groups expressed toward an individual of the same or similar ethnic origin.

Many white employees think that jokes are harmless and that bi-cultural employees should not worry about them. However, several respondents indicated that they have to listen to these jokes all the time and find them hurtful, exhausting and frustrating. As one deployed employee points out, jokes "suck energy." Much of the frustration also lies in their repetitive nature. The jokes return again and again, day in and day out.

Many jokes about crime and terror

The jokes can relate to various stereotypical characteristics. An employee was served a lot of food on her plate in the cafeteria. A co-worker then said, "they saw an African who was hungry." She called this comment "bizarre" and she felt "very annoyed."

Other jokes have the message that the other person is unsafe or suspicious because of a certain origin. For example, an employee was told jokingly that because of his longer beard he is a representative of the Taliban. One respondent witnessed a supervisor enjoying making jokes about theft and drug crimes by Moroccan Dutch people in front of an intern with Moroccan roots. Bystanders also laughed along. When an employee accidentally took a pen, a joke from a colleague followed:

> *"That's always the case with those Moroccans. They rob everything right under your nose."*

At one embassy, a white employee joked to a deployed bi-cultural employee that he was stealing goods for his family. Another is told the joke by colleagues that he would not

qualify for the ministry's regular security screening because of the neighborhood he lives in. Other jokes directed at individual colleagues are about Islam or frizzy hair.

Jokes about ethnic groups

Frequently, jokes are not directed at the individual as in the above examples, but relate to an ethnic or religious group. For example, there are blunt jokes that discredit groups by labeling them as unsafe, talking about "pirates," "mafia" and associating them with drug criminals. Other jokes relate to Islam and wearing a headscarf. These jokes are made in front of bi-cultural employees.

One white employee says he knows that other "white men among themselves make twisted jokes." This is now no longer done in his presence because his co-workers know he is not amused. This respondent says that people "like" to make jokes based on prejudices and unconscious biases. Sometimes they are not aware that it can be hurtful.

One respondent recounted a joke made ridiculing the abilities of bi-cultural employees:

> *"Recently, two people with half an immigrant background (mixed ancestry with a Dutch father or mother) were hired for the diplomacy class. The first jokes were already made: they hired so many immigrants last year and they didn't make it, they ruined it for the other immigrants. Now they only hire people with half an immigrant background. These kinds of silly comments. It's brought as a joke."*

Bullying

Jokes sometimes have a very obvious harassing character. For example, one respondent tells of a woman at an embassy who was constantly harassed because of her husband's ethnicity. "On an ongoing basis" she had to hear that she was married to a welfare recipient and drug dealer. In addition to jokes, she also had the impression that her colleagues were harassing her. Another respondent reported that "especially at the embassies" colleagues were "almost bullied away." Several employees in The Hague also reported being bullied by colleagues. In some cases, the behavior of their colleagues interferes with them to the extent that it is detrimental to their performance. As soon as one colleague wanted to say something, she was constantly told that she should not interfere. Another had to deal with a supervisor who became very controlling, wanting to see emails, resorted to gossiping, not showing up to performance reviews and having weekly meetings removed from the agenda by the secretary just beforehand.

3.6 Ignored and passed over

Many respondents speak of situations where they are ignored and passed over. This can create a feeling of being invisible and not being seen and recognized. This is often experienced by several locally hired colleagues, according to one respondent. In this regard, several respondents reported that deployed co-workers ignore them by not saying hello, as highlighted in the quote below:

> *"Maybe they think you don't have to say hello in the corridors. There are also colleagues who haven't seen you for four months and don't say hello. In the beginning, I still said hello, but when you've done that two or three times and you don't get a response, then you think ok...Or I give a smile once. Then I think: am I not important enough? If they don't say hello to me, they certainly don't do it to the cleaner. Or to people who are invisible in society in general."*

There is also an employee in The Hague who gets no response when she says hello. As seen in the quote above, employees try to find explanations and justifications for why the other person does not say anything. For example, the respondent in The Hague notes that the other person "might be busy." One respondent estimates that locally hired employees are deliberately ignored. Whether consciously or unconsciously, it makes people feel annoyed. One respondent states that this makes her feel that others do not take her seriously.

Ignoring ideas and ignoring during meetings

Ignoring can take different forms. In addition to not saying hello, for example, people can be ignored during meetings. An employee in The Hague has not worked there very long and notices that he is not looked at by colleagues during meetings and they "just ignore him completely, as if you don't participate" and "have little to say." This makes him feel like he doesn't matter. Another tells in a focus group how her ideas were dismissed, while a white colleague made the same suggestion and it was approved. This employee felt "passed over" as a result.

Not conversing with locally hired employees

A locally hired employee says she is ignored at get-togethers because no colleague would come up to her to talk to her. Only the partner of a colleague who, like her, has no Dutch background would engage her in conversation. Although she raises the possibility that it might be because of her, it is a pattern that, as we will see below, is mentioned much more often. Another respondent relates that the ambassador does not want to engage in conversation with locally hired staff. It makes her feel disrespected because her local knowledge and expertise and access to relevant networks are not sufficiently valued. It also makes them feel distrusted by the organization.

Being skipped

Several interviewees reported that they have been passed over. These included employees who wanted to say something during a meeting but - despite a raised hand - were not given the opportunity to do so, employees who were not invited to contribute ideas and thoughts on a topic that actually interested them, and were not involved in anything else by other means. One respondent explained that the ministry is a network organization and that it is therefore important to spar with colleagues about a possible new position. She explains that, for this reason, she asked several colleagues for advice. However, her colleagues did not give her any advice because, according to them, she did not need it since, as a woman of bi-cultural descent, she would automatically end up well. Another respondent said that representatives of an outside organization had complained about the locally hired staff. These employees experienced it as frustrating that their side of the story was not being listened to.

According to Lamont et al. (2016), ignoring and skipping is not necessarily an aggressive act, but it can be considered as a stigmatizing experience. The message behind is that people receive less or no attention or are not allowed to participate because of their ethnic or religious background (Omlo, 2020). Williams et al. (2021) characterize such experiences as racist microaggressions.

3.7 Exclusion and not being allowed to participate

Often mentioned is that employees are explicitly excluded from something. Locally hired employees are regularly not invited to social events, such as receptions, dinners and parties. This sometimes even goes so far that they are allowed to prepare for the party, but are not allowed to be there during the gathering itself. One respondent stated that it is sometimes functional, but clear communication about this is important and is sometimes omitted:

> *"There are get-togethers and meetings for deployed employees only. Sometimes that is functional and a business consideration. Making a distinction is possible and allowed, but you have to be able to explain the reason behind it. You do have to be careful about excluding entire groups. Sometimes there is no other way. Sometimes the explanation is sufficient. But not always. Sometimes it's in people's attitudes. But more often in the subconscious. That they don't realize they are communicating it inadequately. Or they leave the communication to the sub-head when the boss would be better off communicating it himself."*

Exclusion of employees from important visits and meetings

Locally hired employees are also barred from participating in important visits and receptions at some embassies. According to an employee who has worked at several embassies in the past, this is a missed opportunity because these employees have important local information. According to this respondent, they are considered less important and distrusted.

At several embassies, locally hired staff are also not allowed to participate in staff meetings. This prevents them from accessing certain information, which, according to one respondent, is a source of problems. One respondent speaks of a "culture of separate meetings." The "excuse" mentioned was that the working language was Dutch and that locally hired staff could not attend for that reason.

A deployed employee was once asked to leave the meeting while a file he is involved in was being discussed. It frustrates him because it makes him feel that his colleagues do not fully trust him. He thinks that they suspect him of a lack of loyalty because he may also have ties to the country in question. It irritates him that they do not see him as a Dutch colleague who has the ability to be objective, regardless of any cultural ties to a country.

Physical segregation between deployed and locally hired employees

Employees speak of segregation and separate worlds. This physical segregation also occurs at lunches, according to one respondent. There is a clear separation. Locally hired staff sit on one side and deployed staff on the other. Locally hired staff are not happy about this. Another staff member said that the cleaning team and drivers eat elsewhere because they were hired through an external company. This respondent finds this strange because it is always the same drivers and cleaners who work for the embassy. Workplaces are also segregated at some embassies. One respondent says that the local staff work in the basement and the deployed staff work on another floor. Another respondent says the locally hired staff are "squeezed into a clump in a corner," while the deployed staff can do their work in "nice rooms."

Withholding certain information

The next common way locally hired employees are excluded is by not sharing certain information. For example, in several cases, they are not included in mail traffic. Several Hague employees explain that this has to do with the fact that certain information is confidential. Locally hired employees - including white locally hired employees - are therefore not allowed to see certain information. Certain information may only be shared with individuals with a VGB (Certificate of No Objection). This is also meant to protect the people themselves, because it can be used by others. The ministry tries to prevent sensitive information from being passed on. If people have certain information, they can be more easily pressured to share it. That is inherent in ministry work because spying also occurs. In

some countries, locally hired personnel are required to give information to the security department if requested.

However, the above does not justify the way people are sometimes deprived of information. For example, a locally hired employee tells us that she is sometimes shut out of emails through language. If she herself emails in English, she gets an email back in Dutch even though she does not speak and understand this language. This makes her feel excluded and not taken seriously. According to this employee, this form of exclusion is normalized within the organization since this has happened to other colleagues as well. She is also sometimes asked something, but then receives no response or feedback.

Not only locally hired staff mention that information is withheld from them. Both in The Hague and at the embassies, several bi-cultural employees have also experienced that they were taken out of email exchanges, for example, even though the messages were relevant to them.

Exclusion of locally hired employees from decision-making

Locally hired employees, according to several respondents, were also said to have little or no involvement in decision-making and being allowed to contribute ideas. Because expatriate employees decide everything, locally hired employees feel excluded. While they themselves were convinced of their added value and would like to put it to use, their colleagues made insufficient use of it. One expatriate employee has been told by many locally hired employees at various embassies that they feel like "second-class employees" because of these kinds of processes.

3.8 Underestimate and express low expectations

Employees frequently face low expectations, underestimation and little belief in their abilities. For example, several bi-cultural employees report that they are regularly rated "lower" in terms of function. A chairperson of a meeting was mistaken for an employee who brings the coffee, a diplomat was addressed as a secretary, another diplomat was mistaken for a security guard, an expatriate employee was mistaken for a clerk, and a policy officer is regularly approached as an intern or trainee. One employee was referred to the legalization desk in advance when signing in at the front desk without inquiring. Her colleague mistook her for a "foreign person" coming to the ministry to legalize a document. It was a frustrating experience that because of prejudice, she was not approached like colleagues as an employee of the ministry.

Doubting the qualities of bi-cultural employees

There is open doubt about the qualities of bi-cultural employees. One high-ranking employee commented to a relatively new employee that she ‘isn't going to make it in the

ministry anyway'. Sometimes colleagues show that they are clearly surprised when they appear to be performing well. For example, a supervisor told an employee that she did not expect him to "do such a good job" because he does not 'come over as such'. Employees also often receive surprised reactions and compliments that they speak Dutch so well. For these employees themselves, their language proficiency is natural since they were usually born and raised in the Netherlands, and therefore, while such compliments are well-intentioned, they are also misplaced. They again betray the low expectations people have of their bi-cultural colleagues. Some employees find that their language is doubted and they are more likely to be corrected for slips and 'minor typos'.

Furthermore, there are sometimes general disparaging remarks about bi-cultural employees as if they would not master the most basic things. A senior employee once suggested that it might be necessary to adjust the criteria downward in order to increase ethnic diversity.

Low expectations regarding locally hired employees

Locally hired employees also encounter low expectations. For example, they would be looked down upon. One respondent said that a supervisor had low expectations of employees' competencies. Another respondent mentioned that people of a certain ethnic background were considered stupid by their deployed colleagues. In this regard, a deployed employee who has worked at several embassies relates that several deployed employees believe locally hired employees 'cannot and do not understand certain things and are not at their level'. Locally hired employees further feel that the value of their local knowledge and expertise is underestimated. The contrast with how expatriate interns are treated is stark. They are considered experts compared to locally hired staff.

Disadvantage discourse

Underestimation and low expectations are also referred to in academic literature as the disadvantage discourse. This discourse refers to the prejudice that bi-cultural Dutch people are disadvantaged in society. It is also characterized as a microaggression as people are guided by negative stereotypes about people's intellectual abilities and educational level based on their cultural and ethnic background (Ghorashi, 2006; Omlo, 2020; Williams, et al., 2021).

3.9 Calling colleagues the exception to the rule

In many of the examples mentioned, employees are individually stigmatized or excluded because of their ethnicity, skin color, culture or religion. We have also seen stigmatizing remarks about ethnic or religious groups. Respondents regularly experience that following group stigmatization they are told that the negative comments do not relate to them

personally. This is because they are said to be the exception to the rule. This is also known as the exception discourse (Charkaoui, 2019, Omlo, 2020).

Individual colleagues as good model migrants

The potentially reassuring and well-meaning comment "yes, but you're different" after a misplaced ethnic joke or the use of a swear word feels anything but harmless to co-workers. What their colleagues do not seem to realize sufficiently is that the stigmatizing messages can indeed be hurtful and frustrating as they relate to a community to which they may feel connected. It is the religious and ethnic identity of their parents, family and possibly friends that is problematized. One respondent notes that she is positioned by peers as the "good role model migrant" and thus contrasted with people who do share the same background, but are said to be less progressive, religious, principled and intelligent. Sometimes some form of surprise is expressed when people find out that their colleague does not appear to be among the exception after all.

Specific ethnic groups as model migrants

In addition to elevating individual employees to the positive exception, this is sometimes done at the group level (cf. Omlo, 2020). In this case, ethnic groups are compared. Certain ethnic groups are presented as so-called model immigrants. They function as models for other groups that are less successful and would cause all kinds of problems. Mesman (2021) explains that the myth of model migrants is harmful in two ways. First, positive stereotypes can result in extremely high expectations of people who are counted as model migrants. Second, these successful groups are used as a stick to beat other ethnic groups. Mesman concludes that groups are played off against each other in this way.

Exceptions within groups

Finally, exceptions are also made within groups. In this case, for example, it is indicated that a (small) part of the ethnic group differs positively from the ethnic group that would usually, for example, make high use of welfare. Another example is that women and girls are the exceptions within an ethnic group. Men and boys are mostly problem cases.

3.10 Not seeing and treating colleagues as Dutch

At embassies, several deployed bi-cultural employees experience that they are not seen and treated as Dutch by their colleagues. One employee tells how she was talking about a personal issue and was suddenly told out of the blue that she is not a real Dutchman.

> *'Then she said, 'Yes but, you don't understand that, you are not a real Dutchman.' You are a representative of the Netherlands as a diplomat. You wear a pin with a Dutch flag. And then you hear this from your*

colleague. You are on the other side of the world representing this country as a team. And then your colleague says deadpan to your face "Yes, but you're not a real Dutchman. It really demotivates me so much (....) It's not a safe organization. You are different. You remain different. No matter how well you try. You will always be approached differently."

There is a magnifying glass on the (assumed) ethnic origin of the other person and this constantly results in questions about the country of origin. A deployed bi-cultural employee informs researchers in an anonymous e-mail - via a colleague - that he was born in the Netherlands, studied in the Netherlands and is fluent in the Dutch language. Nevertheless, colleagues do not see him as Dutch. One colleague even informed him that he will never be Dutch enough for the embassy. For a deployed bi-cultural Dutch person, the emphasis on the other person's ethnic background results in her having to "regularly reintroduce herself to the same person four times." After all, he is seen as one of many locals in the country. Because employees assume that he is an inhabitant of the country in question because of his ethnicity, when he is introduced, he is also not greeted in English or Dutch, but in the local language.

The bi-cultural employee as an exotic other

Bi-cultural employees in The Hague also share similar frustrations. The focus on their ethnicity causes their colleagues not to recognize them as Dutch and sometimes see them as the "exotic" other. They are often asked where they come from. By certain colleagues they are seen primarily as "the Muslim" or as someone with a certain ethnic identity rather than as a colleague. An incident in this regard was when several Moroccan Dutch people were working in a room. When a white colleague unknown to them noticed this, he said, "so, is it little Morocco here?" Another Moroccan-Dutch employee had a similar experience when he "happened" to be working in a room with a colleague with Moroccan roots. When a senior employee opened the door to the room, he said, "I was looking for two colleagues, but they are two Moroccans." In both examples, employees were approached as if they were not equal colleagues. Instead of approaching them as professionals, their ethnic identity was emphasized in a situation where it was irrelevant.

Being seen as an outsider

The aforementioned experiences make some employees feel that they can never become a true Dutchman in the eyes of certain colleagues. Significantly, the first association some employees have with a bi-cultural colleague is that they are dealing with a locally hired employee. This signals to them that their white colleagues see them as "the other," "a foreigner," "an outsider," and "a visitor." It also gives them the impression that their colleagues are apparently so unaccustomed to diversity in The Hague workplace that they immediately mistake people of color for someone from a foreign country. It means that at

receptions, for example, English is regularly spoken to bi-cultural employees. One respondent says that in the past he was the only one not greeted in Dutch by a former minister. Another respondent said that people reacted "very surprised" when she spoke Dutch back:

> *"Huh, where did you learn Dutch? I was just born in the Netherlands guys. That still prevails a lot. "*

Migration discourse

The tendency to approach bi-cultural Dutch people from a migration frame has also been found in other studies and is described, among other things, as the migration discourse (Charkaoui, 2019; Omlo, 2020). With references to the "homeland" or "country of origin," people (un)intentionally make it clear that they see the other as a person who actually belongs somewhere else. The other person is from elsewhere and not from here. The migration discourse is expressed in the systematic question of where the other person comes from (originally). Particularly for people born in the Netherlands, this question is hardly relevant, if at all. On the contrary, it gives a strange feeling that they are defined as migrants even though they never migrated to the Netherlands. As we have seen above, this tendency to 'othering' can also manifest itself in the explicit message that the other person is not a real Dutchman (Sue, et al., 2007). The migration discourse can make people feel that they are an outsider and do not quite belong.

3.11 Doubting the loyalty of colleagues

One specific form of exclusion that we see in the State Department is a loyalty discourse. This discourse is akin to migration discourse in that it also places great emphasis on people's ethnic backgrounds.

Doubts about bi-cultural employees' loyalty to Dutch interests

A characteristic of the loyalty discourse is that the loyalty of bi-cultural employees to Dutch interests is questioned. One employee explains that this is racism because the doubts about loyalty are based on ethnicity. With white employees, such issues do not arise. One respondent says that doubts about loyalty "affect her very much." Another states that it makes him feel "not welcome." Yet another employee says that it sometimes takes a long time to convince colleagues that they no longer need to doubt the loyalty of certain bi-cultural employees. For some colleagues, the suspicion has always persisted.

The loyalty discourse expresses itself in various ways. Employees regularly ask their bi-cultural colleagues, for example, whether they can represent the Netherlands because of their ethnic background. For example, during a visit by a former minister, a deployed

employee was asked whether she could be placed at the embassy where she worked because of her ethnicity. This was a painful experience for this employee to be addressed so directly by "the ministry's highest boss." Also, a former minister once said in the corridors that it was "not wise to place someone from Curaçao in the embassy of Caracas, because that would create loyalty problems."

Double standards

In addition to these former ministers, other ministry employees regularly comment that bi-cultural employees should not be allowed to work at certain embassies because of dual nationality and/or dual passports. While a few show understanding for this, several respondents noted that there are double standards since all kinds of other colleagues with certain European backgrounds do not face such obstacles. Similarly, there are no doubts about whether employees with Catholic backgrounds can work in Rome, while Islamic backgrounds sometimes cause employees to distrust them.

To obtain a particular position, an employee had to explain whether she could be loyal to Dutch migration policy. This question was not asked of white candidates. A perceived lack of loyalty based on origin and color weighs into positions being distributed, according to this respondent. It is suggested that bi-cultural employees are more "on the side" of another country than on the side of the Netherlands.

Doubts about neutrality

Several employees experience the loyalty discourse as a form of mistrust. They are not seen as "full-fledged Dutchmen." As a result, white employees often assume that their bi-cultural colleagues have a secret agenda. As we saw earlier in section 3.4, the integrity of employees is questioned and their ability to handle confidential information is openly questioned. This calls into question their professionalism. Sometimes it also seems as if there is a fear that bi-cultural staff are biased and thus not neutral on certain issues and therefore not suitable.

One employee was denied access to a particular board that focuses on certain parts of the world as a result. The respondent suspects that it arises from mistrust that she has a connection to that region. Such suspicions and suspicions of a lack of loyalty can persist for a long time. For some colleagues, the suspicion persists.

Employee suspicions and doubts about loyalty are sometimes wrapped up in jokes. Then jokes are made that they are a "mole" or they are asked "funny" questions about whether they can be trusted and what country they represent. These kinds of jokes, according to one respondent, "hit hard" to interns who are still "insecure" and "vulnerable" as they take their first steps into the job market.

Distrust of locally hired employees

Incidentally, there is also distrust of locally hired employees as to whether they are sufficiently loyal to the Netherlands. There are sometimes doubts as to whether their loyalty is no longer to the country in which they live and work. Compared to the experiences of bi-cultural employees, this was much less elaborated on by the interviewed locally hired employees.

3.12 Lack of cultural sensitivity

Many respondents experience a lack of cultural sensitivity among colleagues. They call it an underexposed topic within the organization in which employees are insufficiently trained. Cultural sensitivity involves specific knowledge, attitudes and skills that enable adequate communication with people from different cultural backgrounds. Culturally sensitive employees possess, among other things, general knowledge of cultures, as well as insight into diversity within and between groups, an open, respectful and unbiased attitude and empathic ability (Berger, et al. 2010; Van de Haterd, et al., 2010).

Lack of cultural knowledge

Lack of cultural sensitivity, according to respondents, manifests itself in a tendency not to learn about other cultures and countries, including sometimes the colonial past. Some employees find it difficult to open up and connect with local people. The behavior of locally hired employees is often judged by criteria and norms that are common in Dutch culture.

> *"They are often weighted by the criteria of what is considered desirable behavior in Dutch culture: you have to be articulate, raise your hand if you want to say something during a meeting, address the manager if he does something crazy in public. So that whole Dutch culture of: I say what I think, I am articulate, that is not the case at all in a lot of countries. That doesn't work at all."*

Lack of empathy

Expatriate staff find it difficult to empathize with locally hired staff in particular. Managers at some embassies, due to a lack of cultural sensitivity, reportedly sometimes have difficulty managing locally hired staff and understanding their attitudes and behaviors. It is accompanied by "unfortunate" and "awkward" communication. Sometimes it is "tremendously blunt," "very blunt" and "too direct" and that often does not go down well. They lack a certain empathy and willingness to consider the culture of locally hired employees.

Lack of cultural sensitivity is further manifested at embassies in a focus on Dutch celebrations at embassies such as Sinterklaas and with little attention to local events. And

when celebrating Sinterklaas, the racist nature of Black Pete is ignored at several embassies and in The Hague. Comments are then made such as "we are just going to celebrate Black Pete" or "at the embassies we should just celebrate Sinterklaas with Black Pete." Sometimes, even in the presence of many colleagues, warm feelings are expressed for Black Pete and complaints are made about how unreasonable it is that only 'soot' Petes are allowed to be used.

Problems increase as cultural differences increase

Some respondents expressed concerns about the image of the ministry and Dutch society due to the lack of cultural sensitivity at embassies. In addition, it is said to be a "breeding ground for conflicts, dissatisfied employees, rigidity and reduced output." According to respondents, the greater the cultural differences, the greater the problem of cultural sensitivity. Incidentally, one respondent noted that even locally hired employees need to open up to Dutch norms and values. However, this respondent does argue that management from the Netherlands has the greatest responsibility for immersing itself in the culture of locally hired employees.

Little regard for Islamic holidays and customs

Staff in The Hague also experience a lack of cultural sensitivity among their colleagues at certain times. For example, an important get-together -which is organized once a year- is planned in the middle of Ramadan. For another Muslim employee, a farewell drink was organized during Ramadan. One respondent mentioned that colleagues exerted social pressure to "have a good time" drinking alcohol as well. Employees also mentioned that fasting was problematized and that the sacrificial feast was mocked.

> *"For the Feast of Sacrifice, I wanted to take time off. A consultation necessarily had to be scheduled on that date. I indicated that I had to leave no later than a certain time, otherwise the butcher would be closed and I wouldn't have the sacrificial feast. It was said: I'm not impressed by that, just buy broccoli. And that was a high-ranking employee supposedly pretending to value diversity. This is just really not acceptable."*

3.13 Unfair decisions

Finally, in the examples respondents give of racism, they mention unfair decisions. Several locally hired employees experience this when requesting salary increases. For example, one respondent has not yet received a raise since joining, even though the person in question has worked there for many years. Moreover, this employee's duties have become

much more comprehensive. Respondents indicated that it is a complicated process to adjust salaries. It makes the employee angry and discouraged. Another locally hired employee tells of a colleague who was bullied because of a request for a higher salary. The request was based on the argument that the work was not in line with the salary scale. Eventually, a new supervisor came in and made the raise possible. The employee had to wait three years for it. Another respondent says that locally hired employees did not receive a bonus to which they were entitled under local law. The employees felt they were not taken seriously because representatives of the embassy informed them that they were well paid and did not deserve the bonus.

Other examples of perceived injustice relate to sick leave. For example, one respondent mentioned that different rules apply at their embassies. Unlike expatriate staff, locally hired employees are themselves responsible for finding a replacement to take over their work. If they fail to do so then they are not allowed to sit out at home. Another example is that locally hired employees had to take two or three corona tests when sick before they were allowed to return to the office. When a deployed employee was sick, this person did not have to isolate himself. He "just came" to the office, putting others at risk, according to the respondent. An employee who worked at a post in the past recounted a similar experience at another embassy. There, there was more pressure on employees of color to test themselves for HIV.

Unfair decisions in The Hague

Examples of unjust decisions were also cited in The Hague. One supervisor adjusted a positive assessment of a bi-cultural employee downward without reason. Another respondent mentioned that she was the only one not allowed to go on an annual official trip abroad. A third example involved an employee who was the only one not allowed to take a course even though he still had a lot of leave days and had not taken a course for years.

3.14 Inclusion

The fact that employees experience racism does not preclude that they may also have experiences of inclusion. This results in a certain "sense of belonging", a feeling of belonging and being part of the organization. Respondents also indicated that the work at the State Department strongly appeals to them and that it is also regularly "sociable" and "enjoyable."

Partial inclusion

Inclusion is partial, though. For example, employees in The Hague sometimes experience feelings of inclusion within their own department or board rather than within the entire organization. There are clear differences between different managements. Some directorates are more known for their attention to diversity and inclusion than others. Certain departments are described as "very old-fashioned" and "hierarchical" in this regard. A few employees feel mainly at home in various associations and other social connections in which they are actively involved, such as BIND and the Young Foreign Affairs Association. Some deployed staff feel more at home among locally hired staff than among deployed colleagues.

Several respondents emphasized that at times they feel a sense of belonging thanks to colleagues who are committed to diversity and inclusion. There are colleagues they value because they are empathetic, friendly, professional and show genuine interest in their cultural background. Inclusion is experienced when employees enjoy recognition and respect among their colleagues. This contributes to a climate of social safety and trust. One employee explains that experiences of racism are extra painful because he enjoys working for the ministry and working in a nice team.

> *"I wouldn't want to work in any other ministry. I'm a big fan of the type of work. I'm on a nice functioning team that is enjoyable, so that's positive. It's a fun club. That's why it hurts extra to encounter forms of exclusion."*

Inclusion among locally hired employees

Some of the respondents among locally hired employees also experience inclusion at certain times. Sometimes locally hired staff express appreciation for specific colleagues or initiatives. Another mentions that during the corona crisis, online weekly staff meetings were organized where everyone was allowed to participate, including drivers and kitchen staff. Before the crisis, these meetings were for executives only. This initiative contributed to a sense of cohesion and group spirit. One respondent expresses her appreciation for her deployed staff as follows:

> *"There is also more understanding of individual issues of local employees, as well as local residents of our country. We are recognized and respected. One example is when a respected speaker died, everyone showed respect, interest and sympathy. They also asked what The Netherlands could do for us. Or during staff meetings where we are asked if we also have something to say."*

3.15 The perceived extent of racism

Employees, thus, experience inclusion in addition to racism. An important follow-up question is how widespread experiences of racism are. Since the forms of racism described above were frequently mentioned by respondents, we speak of patterns. The sum of all these patterns does not make racism exceptional. It is a problem that employees encounter frequently.

We also asked the respondents themselves about the extent of the problem. To assess this, people base their assessment on the extent to which they personally encounter racism in the workplace. Certainly, employees who have worked for the organization for many years can draw on a rich wealth of experience. In addition to drawing on personal views, respondents back up their judgments with stories and experiences of multiple colleagues with whom they discuss experiences of racism. Further, they rely on events they observed as bystanders. White employees interviewed naturally draw only on the second and third types of experiences. Finally, there are also employees who, because of the nature of their jobs, are concerned with racism and can estimate the extent of the problem on that basis.

Bi-cultural employees experience racism as a structural problem

Respondents believe the organization underestimates the extent of the racism problem. Interviewees call racism "not an incident," "not an exception" and "not a coincidence," but a "big," "broad," "systematic" and "everyday" problem. It is a "constant factor" and "something that is very common." One respondent said there are so many examples he could write a book about them. Several respondents noted that it is "not just one person, but different people each time" in different departments in the organization and at different levels. Several respondents indicated that all bi-cultural colleagues they know have at least one uncomfortable experience. Respondents call this "worrisome" and an "indication something is wrong." One respondent calls it a structural problem because it is "ingrained in the system."

Some respondents even indicated that certain forms of racism are so common that they forget, repress, "internalize" and "almost normalize" it. Many bi-cultural respondents compare their experiences at the State Department to other organizations. Often this is based on personal experiences they have had at other employers. In other cases, their judgment is based on experiences due to cooperation with other ministries. Interestingly, with one exception, the State Department is rated worse in every comparison. At other organizations, respondents experienced significantly less racism.

Large differences between locally hired employees

Opinions of locally hired staff about the extent of the problem vary more widely. Some of the respondents experience racism on a regular basis. For them, feelings of inclusion are

limited or even completely absent. One respondent states that they only experience inclusion in the presence of other locally hired employees. Another states that she experiences a lot of racism and never inclusion and appreciation. She describes the work climate as "toxic."

At the other end of the spectrum is a respondent who has never personally experienced racism. She explains that she has not worked there very long and mentions that colleagues did experience racism in the past and the embassy was not a safe working environment. The situation has improved now and there is a pleasant atmosphere in the workplace. Her colleagues are also satisfied with the current leadership. In this regard, another respondent indicated that locally hired employees are sometimes enthusiastic about ambassadors who are committed to inclusion, but to their annoyance, they see that their successors regularly value this less.

Between these two extreme experiences, there are also locally hired employees who occupy an intermediate position. These are employees who, while experiencing racism, also report positive experiences. For example, one respondent noted that "not everyone is a racist," and another stated that colleagues who act racist are an exception.

Differences between embassies

That there are greater differences among locally hired employees in judgments about the extent of racism is explicable. Whereas bi-cultural employees gain experiences within different directorates in The Hague and various embassies worldwide, locally hired employees can only rely on their experience at an embassy. This suggests that there can be significant differences between embassies. This is also confirmed by deployed employees who have worked at multiple embassies. Among other things, it depends on the size of the embassy. At smaller embassies, according to several respondents, the atmosphere tends to be better. In addition, an important factor is which ambassadors and managers work at an embassy. Furthermore, one respondent pointed out that the chance of racism increases in countries where the cultural differences with Dutch culture are greater. Finally, a staff member states that ambassadors at embassies that are far away, in "the middle of nowhere," can do a lot of harm. This makes such embassies vulnerable.

3.16 Impact on employees

Experiences of racism are anything but innocent. Such experiences negatively affect employees in a variety of ways. Respondents speak of feelings of "being different" and "not quite belonging," "no matter how hard you try." For several employees, such experiences are accompanied by negative emotions, such as anger, frustration and fear. One former

employee even speaks of a "crippling fear" of making mistakes and as a result became very insecure.

Negative impact on the functioning

Locally hired employees cite racism as demotivating and affecting self-confidence. Trust in the organization and/or supervisors also declines, both among several employees in The Hague and among employees at the embassies. One respondent even indicated that the locally hired staff at their embassy "don't trust anyone from the Netherlands" and that the "distrust is very high." An employee in The Hague has become very disappointed in the organization. She experiences that she has been treated unfairly by both her supervisor and human resources staff. She had counted on more loyalty from the organization after, but found that they "dropped her like a brick without any explanation or pardon." This made this employee feel that she is "worth absolutely nothing to the organization when it comes down to it." Another respondent sees how young people at the beginning of their careers in the ministry already have no hope of improvement. Several respondents argue that racism and its consequences can also have negative effects on how people function. Not feeling safe or sufficiently safe within an organization due to various negative experiences makes employees less productive and effective, according to those involved.

Additional stress and strain

For employees, the experience of racism is associated with uncertainty and stress. This stress comes on top of the general work-related stress that other colleagues may also experience. Sometimes respondents doubt whether racism is present. In despair, they wonder if they are being treated a certain way by a colleague because of their ethnicity or if other aspects are at play. Feelings of doubt are a burden and require extra energy from people because it leads to uncertainty (see also Verkuyten, 2010).

> *"The experiences sometimes lead to doubts. I increasingly think: why do you say that? Is that because I'm wearing a headscarf? Also, recently when I think back more about situations I think: hey, why did that colleague actually say that?"*

Several respondents pointed out that experiences of racism lead to a certain alertness or vigilance to potentially new situations of rejection, stigmatization and exclusion. This is an additional burden for bi-cultural and locally hired employees. In this regard, one respondent speaks of an "unhealthy awareness" that keeps him "constantly occupied. According to him, this should not be the case, but it is a "defense mechanism."

At the same time, another process may be involved. As we described in the introductory chapter, for various reasons, there is a tendency among victimized people not to think

about racism so readily. Typically, people are reluctant to do so. As a result, respondents may not share certain experiences and tend to underestimate the problem of racism.

Conforming coping strategy

The everyday nature of racism in the workplace makes it a part of the work and people feel compelled to relate to racism. As Omlo (2020) argues, it is impossible not to respond because even ignoring racism, is a way of communicating. In response to stressful situations, including racism, according to Omlo, people are forced to employ so-called coping strategies. These are cognitive, emotional or behavioral responses to a stressful situation. People consciously and unconsciously deploy these strategies to reduce, tolerate or overcome the stress and associated negative emotions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In this regard, a bi-cultural employee states that employees "employ a variety of survival strategies to maintain their integrity and enjoyment of work."

Ministry employees employ a variety of coping strategies, but it is beyond the scope of this study to elaborate on all of them. Of note, however, is that a striking number of respondents indicated that they employ a conforming coping strategy. This involves employees adapting to the situation in the hopes of increasing their chances of appreciation, acceptance, respect and equal treatment and avoiding racism (Omlo, 2020). Conforming is manifested in the ministry by working extra hard, acting extra friendly, exemplary or funny by "clowning around," paying more attention to your grooming and culturally conforming to the organizational culture. Several respondents feel it is necessary to "deny" some of one's own cultural and religious identity. Several bi-cultural employees assimilate partly for this reason whereas others decide not to give in to it. There are also some who hide part of their own identity in the workplace.

The various forms of overcompensation are demanding for those involved, require a lot of energy and create a "restless feeling." Employees are always taking precautions to prove that they are "good" and reliable employees and to avoid new experiences of racism in the future. One respondent explained that while he conforms, he is pessimistic about the chances of inclusion:

> *"It's an inferiority complex that many people from immigrant backgrounds face. So you start overcompensating. Being extra sweet, funny, etc. That causes you to accept things you really shouldn't. Working extra-long hours because you feel you have to prove yourself. You feel like you are starting with a 1-0 deficit. You have to catch up, but you never catch up. It's an unattainable station. In your head, you do try all the time. It's also very subconscious."*

Employees feel they are under a "magnifying glass" and, in doing so, also experience a responsibility to the collective to which they are counted (by others and/or themselves).

Not having to worry about possible perceptions of the group is a "luxury" that bi-cultural employees do not have. They cannot "afford" to think only of themselves. They want to prevent other bi-cultural employees from being harmed by their "missteps." White employees do not have to worry about creating an image of "their" ethnic group. According to one respondent, they are favored without realizing it.[13]

To avoid confirming present stigmas about ethnic groups, employees are often preoccupied with image formation. From a "compulsive awareness" of how they come across to others, they are obsessively concerned with how they present themselves to their colleagues. This sometimes leads to "panicking." For example, an employee feels pressure to always be friendly and does not feel the space to complain or be cranky once. Many employees feel compelled to do everything they can to "not make a mistake." It is also noted that making mistakes confirms a perception that diversity brings problems. They are aware of the "detrimental risk" to the "cause of inclusion" and therefore employees want to be "careful," "be the perfect public servant" and not "ruin it" for others. There is a sense that they have to work harder and prove themselves more. "The bar" is "very high." Thus, they weigh their words "carefully" and check their emails several times for any language errors:

> *"If I make a spelling mistake in a memo it would be linked to my ethnic background much faster. I'm 100% sure of that. With a white colleague, it would be said that he is less sharp or having a bad day or that he slept badly. So you check your mail three times, you're very conscious of what you're saying. You start putting a lot of value on language and you're very conscious about it. Just to avoid just giving people opportunities to say it's because of your background. That you're going to be rejected or limited in your opportunities to advance because of that."*

Overcompensation among locally hired employees

Respondents report that locally hired employees at embassies also try extra hard because they are treated "inferiorly" by managers. The overcompensation manifests itself mainly in the tendency to make oneself "very subservient to please the line manager." Another locally hired employee also makes extra efforts:

> *"I try extra hard, work overtime, try not to stand out, because I don't want to be embarrassed and want to be liked."*

Avoidant coping strategy

In addition to conforming, employees often appear to employ an avoidant coping strategy. In this case, instead of trying to change a racist situation themselves, employees

[13] Some forms of unequal treatment do play out for specific groups such as people with LGBT+ background and women, but certain forms play out specifically only for bi-cultural employees and locally hired employees of color.

choose to avoid and minimize the situation, the conflict and its impact (Omlo, 2020). For example, employees choose to avoid certain people and places - where they expect racism. Whereas one employee avoided lunches with co-workers for a period of time, another says she stayed away from get-togethers because of previous negative experiences. One locally hired employee mentions that she likes the fact that she can work from home more often since the corona crisis because it means she doesn't have to face certain colleagues. Another avoids a certain department within the embassy. Avoidance is also reflected in not confronting people by ignoring racism, resulting in people bottling up negative experiences.

3.17 Conclusion

Broad spectrum of experiences with racism

We conclude that bi-cultural and locally hired employees face a broad spectrum of experiences of racism. Respondents experience verbal aggression and derogatory treatment. They experience inappropriate stigmatization and condemnation of the cultures of different ethnic groups. Employees also experience that white colleagues accuse and suspect them (in advance). They are accused of dangerous or radical views, espionage, theft, fraud, lack of integrity and unfairly obtaining positions within the organization, among other things.

Racism, according to respondents, can be expressed in racist jokes. Another form of racism is being ignored and passed over. Often mentioned is that employees are explicitly excluded from social events, important visits and meetings. Group stigmatization also takes place, with colleagues being named as positive exceptions. This may be intended as a compliment, but for the employees in question, it is rather a painful and frustrating experience since such negative stigmas relate to a community to which they feel a certain degree of connection. Moreover, it is the religious or ethnic identity of their parents, family and possibly friends that is problematized. Employees further encounter a lack of cultural sensitivity, unfair decisions, not being seen as Dutch, low expectations and underestimation. Furthermore, employees experience that their loyalty to Dutch interests is questioned.

Subtle versus overt racism

As we indicated in the introduction to this report, racism can be aggressive, direct, overt and deliberate, but it can also be subtle, indirect, hidden, unintentional or unconscious. In this chapter, we have omitted such qualifications when describing the experiences because it is not always easy to determine whether racism is overt or subtle. The question is also who determines that. Does it depend on the intentions of the messenger or is the way

the aggrieved person interprets and processes it decisive? Clearly, the context, intentions and interpretations can vary from situation to situation, making it complicated to attach certain qualifications to the different forms of racism (cf. Omlo, 2020). In general terms, we can say that employees experience both subtle and overt racism.

It is important to emphasize that other research shows that subtle racism can be hurtful and is not necessarily less harmful than overt racism. Especially when such experiences are persistent, it is more difficult to simply ignore them. The sum of everyday experiences of racism can have a profound and depressing effect on people's well-being (cf. Essed, 1984). Subtle racism carries the potential to eventually become a "creeping poison" that is much more elusive and difficult to resist (Omlo, 2020). Several studies show that these experiences can result in depression, fear and anxiety, decreased well-being and a decline in self-esteem (Solorzano, 2014; Williams, et al., 2021).

Experiences of inclusion

It is not the case that every respondent experiences all the forms of racism described, but it is clear that these are patterns of racism. Indeed, each form of racism is experienced personally by many respondents and is additionally observed among colleagues. Thus, different patterns of racism were found in contact with white colleagues in the workplace.

Racism as a structural problem

Many respondents indicated that racism is a structural problem within the organization. On top of that, we identified a variety of experiences with racism. Since these were mentioned frequently, we spoke of patterns. The sum of all these patterns makes racism a problem that bi-cultural and locally hired employees encounter frequently. Local hired employees' opinions about the extent of the problem vary more widely. This seems to indicate that the problem can vary greatly from embassy to embassy. Incidentally, it was indicated that such differences also occur between different directorates in The Hague.

Negative consequences of racism

Finally, we have seen that racism has several negative consequences. Racism results in insecurity, stress, anger, frustration, anxiety, reduced motivation and self-confidence, among other things. It also decreases trust in the organization and colleagues.

In response to racism, many employees feel compelled to overcompensate in hopes of increasing their chances of appreciation, acceptance, respect and equal treatment and avoiding racism. Overcompensation manifests itself in such ways as working extra hard, acting extra friendly and culturally adapting to the organizational culture. Several respondents feel it is necessary to deny some of their own cultural and religious identities. They feel that they have to work harder than their white colleagues to prove that they are reliable and high-functioning employees. This overcompensation is demanding for

employees and requires a lot of energy. In addition to overcompensation, employees employ an avoidance strategy in certain situations by, for example, avoiding certain people and places - where they expect racism.

4 Institutional racism

In the previous chapter we focused on the perceived racism in the workplace stemmed from the interactions with colleagues. In doing so, we saw that there are different patterns of racism. Moreover, many respondents experience racism as a structural problem. In this chapter, we look for explanations and consider whether there are also certain risk factors and mechanisms within the organization that allows for racism. We examine whether institutional racism exists. This occurs when 'the processes, policies and rules (written and unwritten) of institutions lead to structural inequality between people of different background, skin color or religion'. This involves two types of rules or processes: (1) "rules or processes that explicitly differentiate and intend to create inequality, and (2) rules or processes (written or unwritten) that do not explicitly differentiate between groups, but in practice cause one group to be disadvantaged and another group to be advantaged" (Felten, et al., 2021, p. 7).

Institutional racism can be found both in formal, written rules and in the more informal rules expressed in organizational culture (Fermin, et al. 2021). Since we did not analyze formal policies, the focus of this exploration was on unwritten, informal rules. Therefore, in this chapter we focus on specific processes and mechanisms in organizational culture that enable, perpetuate, exacerbate, or provide insufficient safeguards against racism. In doing so, we focus on processes in enrollment, career advancement and resignation. We also focus on whether there is a strong social norm of non-discrimination within the ministry. Finally, we look at the complaint procedure and organizational culture.

4.1 Unfair processes in the enrollment

Many respondents indicated a lack of ethnic diversity within the ministry. Several explanations are given for the lack of diversity. For example, a diversity policy to increase the diversity of staff is said to have been started rather late. There is insufficient effort, according to respondents, to actively recruit people with a bi-cultural identity.

According to several respondents, there has been an improvement in enrollment in recent years. In this regard, the State Department's "Diversity and Inclusion Policy Vision 2021" states that the enrollment of employees from bi-cultural backgrounds cannot be accurately measured. Only 'organization-wide figures' are available within the central government. These show that progress has been made in recent years and that the ministry is not doing badly within the central government compared to other ministries. According to the ministry, the enrollment is 'fine'. In 2018, the enrollment of bi-cultural employees was reported to be 17.4% (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021).

Prohibited rejections based on origin

The risk of institutional racism can be reduced by organizing fair processes in enrollment (see Felten, et al., 2021). Unfair processes are written or unwritten rules and mechanisms that intentionally or unintentionally encourage unequal treatment.

We note that despite improvements in intake, unfair processes play a role. For example, when reviewing cover letters and job interviews, explicit rejection occurs based on ethnicity, which is prohibited by law. For example, one respondent recounted that employees noted that they would no longer hire people of a certain ethnicity because they once had a "very bad one" who "made language mistakes all the time." Another respondent who conducted job interviews was told by colleagues not to hire someone as an intern because of her ethnicity. An example was mentioned at the embassies where a suitable bi-cultural candidate was suggested by a manager and other team members. A high-ranking staff member rejected that candidate because the candidate explicitly stated she was looking for 'just, a nice, fresh, young, blonde girl with blue eyes'. So the other candidate was not hired because of looks and ethnicity. Another respondent recounted how an ambassador communicated in black and white that 'he did not want someone with a Moroccan background'. In the end, he was able to convince the ambassador. Upon arrival at the embassy, he was made very clear by 'the second man' that he was not welcome.

Headscarf as the reason for rejection

Several respondents said that wearing a headscarf could be grounds for not getting a job. There are doubts about whether employees wearing headscarves can properly represent the Netherlands abroad. Several white employees also acknowledge that wearing a headscarf can be a reason for rejection for certain colleagues.

Favoring Dutch expatriate employees

The policy vision for diversity and inclusion indicates that "preference is still fairly systematically given to an applicant of Dutch origin (recruited locally or in the Netherlands), which can negatively impact diversity and inclusion in the post" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021: p. 8). A locally hired employee indicated that he also experienced this.

Suspicious and inappropriate questions and comments in job interviews

In several cases, suspicious and inappropriate questions were asked. For example, an applicant for a possible job in The Hague was asked how she would combine a possible job with raising her child, since she is a single mother:

"Then it was also about my family situation. I was asked: what about your child? How old is your child? Who looks after her? Those are forbidden questions. There are plenty of single, white mothers at the State Department."

This candidate did not get the job. If the questions asked about single motherhood played some part in the rejection, then prohibited discrimination occurred. The same applies to questions about a candidate's ethnicity. One candidate mentions that she was asked about her origin and experienced this as uncomfortable. It made her feel that her loyalty was questioned in advance. Incidentally, this candidate did get the job.

One respondent with Moroccan roots was confronted in a job interview with an accumulation of all kinds of prejudices about Moroccan Dutch people. Many other respondents reported inappropriate questions related to their Islamic background. For example, questions were asked whether their religion does not stand in the way of working in a particular country, what the applicant thinks about homosexuality, whether the applicant drinks alcohol and whether the applicant would ever wear a headscarf. These are questions that respondents believe are not relevant to the position and are not asked to employees who are not Muslim.

Sometimes applicants were asked about their political views on whether or not to take back so-called "Syria-goers" (i.e. people who went to Syria to help ISIS), the conflict between Palestine and Israel, and other Middle Eastern issues. One respondent calls such questions legitimate to a certain extent since their function is to find out whether applicants can properly substantiate their views. However, the objection expressed by several respondents is that they are asked a relatively large number of these kinds of questions and that their white colleagues are hardly ever asked about these kinds of issues. It gives them the feeling that their loyalty to Dutch society and government has to be tested and that they have to prove their loyalty during the interview. One respondent got the impression that they are being tested to see if they are not too "extremely Islamic." Another noted that there is little visibility into rules about what is and is not appropriate to ask in a job interview. No format is applied, it rather depends on the insight of those involved. As a result, choices for certain types of questions and decisions about candidates are largely determined by personal views and possible biases. It is also influenced by prevailing norms in the organizational culture where certain institutional preferences and stereotypical images may also be influential (cf. Fermin, et al., 2021). This poses a risk of unequal treatment.

Unfriendly and intimidating treatment

One respondent had a strong impression that she was rejected because of her skin color and ethnicity, an experience she had never experienced before in her life. She indicated

that she was treated unkindly during the job interview. It started as early as her arrival when the employee's look changed immediately when she saw the applicant. The respondent saw a look of "disgust" and "rejection." During the interview itself, questions were asked in an unfriendly and intimidating manner. At times during the interview, she was also snapped at. As mentioned above, she was also asked forbidden questions about how she would combine her job with single motherhood, while several single white women are working at the ministry. It was a rather awkward and brief conversation. At the end of the interview, she was informed that she was not suitable for the position and even her resume and cover letter were torn up and thrown in the trash. Goodbyes were said in an aloof, cold manner and she was not given a handshake. Since she was very qualified, both in terms of education and work experience, the quick decision and the treatment she experienced as very rude made her feel that she was not given a fair chance.

Favoritism for one's own group

In addition to explicit rejection, respondents argue that there is sometimes a blind spot among those involved that prevents potential bi-cultural candidates from being invited for interviews. As Felten et al. (2021) describe based on various studies, the exclusion of certain groups does not necessarily stem from an aversion to specific ethnic groups. In fact, there may also be favoritism for one's own group because one is more familiar with it.

At the State Department, favoritism also comes into play. It occurs indirectly. Often ministry employees would become fixated on candidates who have gone through a similar educational path as the average white employee. The unwritten rule is that the ideal candidate has completed VWO (pre-university education), followed by university education, board experience and (part) of the study or internship abroad. In a focus group, one respondent emphasized that the requirement of experience abroad through internships and training has now been removed. This was a requirement in the past and it is not yet known to everyone that this has been changed.

Of course, there are also bi-cultural candidates who meet the above criteria, but this is not obvious. For example, respondents indicated that bi-cultural Dutch people sometimes come from families where studying is not the norm. In some cases, they are the first in the family to have attended college or university. Partly because family members are less able to inform them, they are unaware or less aware of opportunities to study abroad and the importance of involvement in a student union. Financial circumstances can also limit people from making such decisions. There would be insufficient attention to this in the ministry. At the same time, there is a blind spot for a variety of other relevant efforts, such as volunteering, informal care and supporting their parents with their administration.

Furthermore, respondents indicated that bi-cultural Dutch are more likely to have longer school careers because a higher proportion of them are stackers. Sometimes as a result of

more debatable lower school recommendations, they have first pursued intermediate and higher education before being able to pursue university studies. Rather than seeing this primarily as a sign of strong perseverance and willpower, this is more a reason to doubt such candidates. For example, one respondent recounted an incident where a supervisor actually preferred a white person over the bi-cultural candidate for this reason. Another occurrence related to a candidate with a refugee background who came to the Netherlands later in life. Although this person also started with a MBO study, she eventually managed to successfully complete a university degree. This person was strongly motivated to work for the ministry and thus tried to enter in various ways. Despite several interviews, she was rejected several times for unclear reasons.

Racism through a focus on specific competencies and experiences

In addition to the educational path followed, the recruitment and selection process also focuses on specific competencies. One respondent says that people are explicitly sought who are empathetic, extroverted, relationship-oriented and who can and want to adapt strongly to the dominant norms within the organization by the ambition to grow quickly. This respondent - like another respondent, incidentally - emphasizes that employees who meet this profile are valuable and necessary, but at the same time it is a disadvantage for the organization to focus on one type of profile. Moreover, some of the talented bi-cultural candidates, who, partly because of their cultural background, are modest and less forward-looking according to this respondent, quickly fall by the wayside.

A different attitude and outlook are needed, according to several respondents, in order not to exclude these people a priori and thereby also create space for people with different experiences and qualities. Now racism is the result of preconceived notions about who fits within the organizational culture and certain cultural norms about what constitutes success and relevant life experience. One respondent puts it this way:

> *'That also brings with it certain life knowledge, life experience, qualities and talents. I sometimes feel that there is still not enough attention paid to the extra talents and qualities that people of color and also people of different socioeconomic statuses can bring. They are often people who are much more self-reliant, and more creative in coming up with solutions. You're actually mature from a young age, so you have a lot of life experience. There is too much looking at a resume and not enough looking at what someone has experienced in life. Where does someone come from? That also says a lot about the person and motivation."*

All in all, the focus on specific criteria, competencies and experiences seems to indicate processes in the enrollment that assume certain cultural norms that in practice favor white people (Felten, et al., 2021; Wekker & Lutz, 2001) and disadvantage bi-cultural people.

Tokenism in the enrollment

Diversity policies can sometimes (unintentionally) result in so-called tokenism. This means that bi-cultural employees are hired for symbolic motives to create an image that the organization takes diversity and inclusion seriously. With tokenism, the organization does not adequately see the added value of diversity and inclusion. For bi-cultural employees, tokenism means that they are insufficiently valued for their personal talents and skills (Ashikali & Fontein, 2022; Weber, et al., 2018).

Several respondents mentioned that they sometimes experience or fear tokenism. They express the feeling that striving for diversity is seen by the organization as a compulsory number, a standard that must be met without embracing the essential value of cultural diversity. They state that statements about diversity are mostly for window-dressing.

Several respondents questioned whether they were used and strategically deployed to convey to the outside world an image that the organization values ethnic diversity. It sometimes makes people question whether they are being asked to do something for the "right reasons" or whether there is "opportunism." Employees hope that they are involved in something out of a recognition and appreciation of their talent or because the organization genuinely believes in the added value of diversity.

Tokenism also seems to occur at times when bi-cultural employees are used in promotional materials in the recruitment policy, because the organization wants to project a diverse image. Another factor here is that it is not always clear why the organization wants to present this image. As a result, several employees themselves experience a double feeling about it. On the one hand, they want to show other people with a bi-cultural background that it is possible to work in the ministry and to set an example. On the other hand, employees do not want the organization to use them only for symbolic reasons.

4.2 Unfair processes in career advancement

According to the ministry, the enrollment of bi-cultural colleagues is quantitatively allright, however the challenge lies mainly in the advancement of them to higher policy and managerial positions. The "Policy Vision on Diversity and Inclusion 2021" indicates in this regard that exact figures are lacking, but the ministry concludes that the organization is still underperforming at these levels (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021).

Many respondents also noted that advancement to higher positions is difficult. Among ambassadors and director positions, for example, there are few employees with bi-cultural backgrounds. One top official notes that the governing council has never had a bi-cultural employee. And another respondent states that at the level of department heads there is hardly any ethnic diversity. Exact figures on the progression are lacking, as mentioned. What is clear is that the perception that the advancement is stagnant is widely held among the respondents. Moreover, as with enrollment, there are various unfair processes within the organization that explain the lack of career advancement.

Cultural preservation hinders advancement opportunities

Many Hague staff and expatriate staff at embassies - including white staff - conclude that lack of conformism and assimilation to certain norms of behavior within the organization is a major reason why career advancement stalls. When employees cling too much to cultural backgrounds, they limit their career opportunities. A deployed employee explains how cultural biases negatively affect advancement opportunities. For example, there are perceptions that employees are too subdued because of their cultural background.

The importance of conforming applies to all employees, including women. The number of women in top positions is increasing, but only a certain type of woman advances to the top, according to one respondent: the 'alpha, red, dominant women'. Men with "seven check marks" (see Luyendijk, 2022) are the "tacit norm," according to respondents. Women with "six check marks" have been added in recent years.

Employees in higher positions, according to Luyendijk and several respondents, tend to select mainly people who look like them. It is important for employees in top positions to be able to work with people with whom they are familiar and with whom they can identify.

Old boys network and cronyism

There is frequent talk of the "old boys network," "cronyism" and the mutual allocation of great jobs to colleagues they remember from their former student union. This "system" limits the advancement opportunities of many bi-cultural employees. Conforming to the organizational culture increases the opportunity for relatively new employees to also join this network. Employees who have participated in "the class" also enjoy privileges. Those who are not part of the network or "don't play the right game" are less likely to be considered for higher positions.

According to several employees, the limited opportunities for advancement are also related to a certain system. Whereas human resources used to have a strong guiding role, nowadays it has little influence. The decision-making power now lies with executives, managers and ambassadors. According to several staff members, this creates a risk of

acting more arbitrarily. This system would enable and perpetuate the aforementioned favoritism.

Having to work harder to prove qualities

Another bottleneck is that respondents perceive that they have to work much harder than their white colleagues to prove that they are qualified for advancement. They see that sometimes it is enough for white employees to be average performers to qualify for vertical career growth. In contrast, several bi-cultural employees feel that they must be exceptionally good.

> *"Why do you always have to be the best to make it? There are plenty of white men here who hold high positions and are average performers. Not top of the class. Sometimes they are fine or even bad managers. I don't have that space or luxury. I have to be top of the class or I won't get there. I know that for sure. The Dutch with a migration background who are at the top now, there are very few of them, but they are all people who were top of the class. They are brilliant. They had to work so hard to get to where they are. That's unfair. There is no level playing field."*

In some cases, low expectations and prejudices play into why bi-cultural employees do not advance. For example, several respondents indicated that comments are made that bi-cultural employees cannot be department heads, based in part on the belief that they will not be taken seriously by co-workers.

Criticism of the idea that diversity policies take a long time to implement

Another argument used by some employees to justify the lack of diversity at the top is that it takes a long time. With this type of reasoning, it will take years before suitable bi-cultural candidates are available for top positions. In fact, this is an acceptance of the status quo and assumes that there are currently no (potential) top talents within the organization.

Racism is sometimes difficult to prove while climbing the career ladder

Several employees indicated that it is sometimes difficult to substantiate that missed promotions are the result of racism. Actual motives can easily be concealed, according to one respondent, because supervisors can easily bring in other arguments as to why someone is not yet ready for the next step or why another was preferred. Although it is sometimes difficult to prove in individual cases, it is clear to many respondents that there are problems in the advancement of bi-cultural employees, because they clearly see that little diversity is visible at the top on a collective level.

Racism in the horizontal career growth

Racism in horizontal career growth has been little discussed. There was, however, a notable experience during a transfer. Without consultation, an employee had to leave an embassy early because the employee was said to be too outspoken. It took this employee by surprise because there had never been an intake meeting or performance review. Moreover, this employee was under the impression that white colleagues were making similar statements and they were accepted. The employee was disappointed that human resources took over the ambassador's decision without questioning it, or attempting to mediate or encourage a conversation. Because there was no support, the employee in question felt abandoned by the organization.

Tokenism in career advancement

In intake and recruitment policies, some of the respondents see tokenism. Several employees also see tokenism in career advancement. One respondent explained that in certain parts of the world, the ministry consciously wants to present a diverse image and is therefore more likely to send out bi-cultural employees. In other parts of the world, the deployment of bi-cultural staff is more likely to be seen as a disadvantage for various reasons. So color and origin, according to this respondent, play into the choices that are made. The problem is that the motivations for such choices are not made explicit and therefore remain implicit and unclear to employees.

4.3 Unfair processes contributing to resignation

In the "Policy Vision for Diversity and Inclusion 2021," the ministry mentions that resignations are low compared to other departments (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021).[14] However, this is not to say that resignations are also low compared to other organizations. But more importantly, it is not just about numbers. Unfair processes that encourage the resignation of locally hired staff are also important. We discuss this in more detail below.

Dropping out because of lack of advancement opportunities and assimilation pressure

Due to the lack of vertical advancement, bi-cultural employees receive the message that it is not or hardly possible to advance. The risk is that people do not get the chance to develop themselves upwards and – as a result, they drop out and leave the organization. Some mention a lack of role models who can act as examples for others. Several respondents pointed out that people have actually left because of the lack of advancement opportunities.

[14] Exact figures are not given.

"We also see that executives are not people of color. That also works a little demotivating. We are looking for a role model that you can look up to. You do start asking yourself: is it an organization where you want to work for decades if you see that advancement is possible to a lesser extent for you? You don't see it happening very well right now and the numbers show that the advancement is not there. That's demotivating. How long do you have to work there to advance to a managerial position, while maybe you can get more recognition and appreciation elsewhere at another organization? People have left because they had the perception: here you don't grow into a managerial position after 7 years."

Some of the employees are leaving or considering leaving because of the combination of a lack of advancement opportunities and perceived assimilation pressure:

"It's an archetypal Dutch organization. You have to know all the customs. I also decided at one point: I want to move on and grow. That's not possible here. I also hear that from others who have dropped out."

"Personally, I am not sure I would want to apply for a permanent contract at Foreign Affairs because conformism and also the demand to assimilate is incredibly high, I think. In doing so, I personally would have to sacrifice too much of who I am. I notice that a lot of other colleagues with a non-Western background have the same."

Experiences of racism and lack of inclusion as a departure motive

Others mention that employees leave because of an accumulation of experiences with racism. A lack of an inclusive work environment also plays a role, as it does not allow people to feel sufficiently at home. Sometimes there are interns who already leave during their internship for these reasons. One respondent mentioned that there are also colleagues who have dedicated themselves to diversity and inclusion for a long time, but over time become tired and demotivated because they find that little changes within the organization. Out of disappointment, these colleagues left.

Weak legal status of domestic workers as a risk

Several respondents pointed out the weak legal status of ambassadors' domestic staff and the risk that they could be fired relatively easily. These people are not employed by the embassy and the central government, but they are paid by the ministry. The ambassador enters into a contract with them. Their living conditions are also not always good, for example, because they work far too long hours. They are a vulnerable group. If fired, they

can be deported from the country, as they are often from other countries. Because of their weak legal status, they have "no leg to stand on." If they are unlucky, they have to live with people in their homes for four years. They sometimes live in basements and outhouses. People who have worked at various embassies in the past express great concern:

> *"They can also be fired just like that. In one country, all the domestic workers were fired one by one. That's a tragedy for those people. You throw them into poverty. I find that inadmissible for Foreign Affairs. And if that happens, it should be done with a settlement. I do find that vulnerable. Everybody in the pyramid has some power. At the bottom of the pyramid, of course, you are the most vulnerable. Foreign Affairs's job is to protect those people. It's a tragedy for the people. It's almost life or death. What I see racism in is the lack of equal treatment. The utmost care you have to show in order to fire me is quite different from the driver, the domestic staff or the cook. Those people depend on that position even harder than I do. "*

> *"Domestic workers are extremely vulnerable. They have personal contracts with the 'chef de post'. They can basically fire people on the spot, and that happens regularly. It's a huge mess: everyone gets sacked. You've worked for a business for 10 years and suddenly you're out on the street. It depends on local law. That applies to them. That doesn't mean anything. Then you can't do anything as employees."*

Locally hired employees fear layoffs

There is also criticism on the position of locally hired staff working at embassies. One employee who has had a lot of contact with locally hired staff at various embassies in the course of work heard stories of ambassadors threatening to fire them if they did not do something. According to this respondent, employees are reluctant to contradict, refuse requests or criticize because they know they can be "easily fired." As for domestic workers, dismissal can have major consequences. Finding alternative work is not easy in some countries.

Several locally hired employees fear being fired if they speak out about experiences with racism. At some embassies, employees say there is a culture of fear. One locally hired employee describes the vulnerability and risk of dismissal as follows:

> *"It makes myself and others vulnerable. You are at the mercy of your manager. Even though you work hard, if the manager doesn't like you, your contract will be terminated or not renewed. The manager is aware of this and they also know how difficult it is to find another job in*

certain parts of the world. This is used against you: your country cannot provide you with a job, but we can. So take it or leave it. If you don't want the job, we'll find someone else. Local employees here suffer from this situation (...) If black local employees make mistakes, they are threatened with dismissal. If white local employees make mistakes, black employees have to help them. The same goes for white Dutch employees. We are asked to support, but alas, if we make mistakes.. (....) They have a choice: either fire you or make your life unbearable. If the ambassador doesn't like you, then you have a problem."

Risk of abuse of power

Several respondents felt that ambassadors are given too much space to "play power games" with locally hired staff. Ambassadors have too much power and there is (a risk of) abuse of power, according to some respondents.

"In fact, you feel that you are not employed by the ministry, but by the ambassador. Because the ambassador, as a representative of the ministry, has the power to extend or terminate your contract. So that means that the person you have to impress is the ambassador and not the ministry. If that one person wants to fire you, they will do it. In fact, it doesn't matter how good you are. (...) Too much power is given to people. They act like kings and presidents."

4.4 Absence of a strong social norm of non-discrimination

An important mechanism that encourages racism is the lack of a strong social norm of non-discrimination (Felten, et al., 2021). Employees are less likely to engage in racist behavior if they have the impression that it is strictly disapproved by the organization and its employees. In other words, if there is a clear message from the organization that racism will not be tolerated, it can have a positive effect on employee behavior.

Lack of recognition of racism as a problem due to innocent self-image

The fact that employees experience various forms of racism is a sign that the norm of non-discrimination is not sufficiently propagated in practice. On top of this, many respondents noticed that there is no recognition of the existence of racism within the ministry - both in The Hague and at the embassies. The "majority" and the "average employee" assume that racism does not occur or hardly occurs within the ministry. The extent and seriousness of the problem is greatly underestimated.

The self-image of the organization, according to respondents, is "tolerant," progressive, "diplomatic," "harmless," and partly because of working in different countries, "open-minded." Based on this self-image, many employees cannot imagine racism. Calling the organization racist is perceived as a major accusation. It evokes in many people the association of overt racist violence and aggression, such as the "Ku Klux Klan." There is thus a narrow interpretation of what constitutes racism. There are different manifestations of racism and as mentioned, not all of them are malicious and deliberate. In particular, employees overlook subtle racism. There is a "complete blind spot" for that. Therefore, it is not necessarily "unwillingness," employees have "absolutely no idea." Even in two focus groups, there was a tendency among some participants to want to limit racism to its overt and aggressive forms. This tendency makes racism an extremely sensitive and uncomfortable topic that is often still taboo, making it difficult to discuss. In this regard, one respondent notes that "racism" is a forbidden word.

A few think that racism has been recognized in recent years partly because of social developments, but note that there is little awareness of the negative impact such experiences have on people. In addition, people would see racism mainly in other employees, managements and embassies rather than within their own teams, let alone themselves. Thus, people point to others and are "blind" to their own prejudices. Some employees see this research as a token of recognition of the problem.

Relativization and denial of racism

The vast majority of respondents think that racism is not acknowledged by the majority. Even when employees try to discuss experiences of racism, there is a tendency to question, downplay, trivialize or deny them. Employees are blamed for "being a crybaby" or for not having a sense of humor.

> *"There was a lot of annoyance when you tried to discuss that. Very quickly it became: you are playing the victim, there are enough opportunities here and people shouldn't act like a crybaby. (...) Then it was immediately like: well, don't exaggerate and don't whine. "*

Not taking people's experiences seriously undermines the social norm of non-discrimination.

Passive racism

That the norm of non-discrimination is not sufficiently propagated by employees is also apparent from the many experiences of passive racism. According to Essed (1984), passive racism means being complicit in racism coming from others if they do not bother to condemn racist actions or do not intervene one way or another the moment it occurs. Only a few have experienced that a bystander did intervene and that gave them moral support. Many employees experienced that their colleagues turned a blind eye and rarely

called others out for it. Several respondents indicated that no one has ever stood up for them.

> *"I haven't yet experienced bystanders saying anything about it. Usually, people laugh about it. I couldn't help but notice that nothing is said."*

Sometimes colleagues refer back to the incident at a later time to express support and condemn their colleague's behavior. This is appreciated, but there is a particular need to actively communicate the norm of non-discrimination at the moment of racism occurring. At the same time, there is also an understanding that it is difficult because, according to one respondent, "it takes a lot of courage" to speak out. Bystanders also lack a safe working environment to openly speak out about racism. Especially if there is a power-dependence relationship, people are less likely to do so.

Possible reasons why bystanders do not intervene

Respondents cited several possible reasons why they believe their colleagues do not intervene, including fear of repercussions and the possible negative impact on their careers. They would also fear not being taken seriously. Sometimes there is also a reluctance to take action. Based on good intentions, some employees may want to protect and support their colleague, but they don't know how or they doubt their colleague would appreciate it. Reluctance to take action also means that employees are uncertain about their ability to intervene in a meaningful way. In a focus group, a white employee mentioned that she had also been told on occasion that a colleague had experienced racism. This respondent felt a need for action perspectives. She struggled with whether to do anything with this report, was not sufficiently familiar with the options and did not know whether to apply certain regulations.

Bystanders would also not speak up because of the lack of a feedback culture; calling each other to account for behavior generally does not happen or hardly happens at all. One explanation given for this is that people are afraid it could affect their careers within the organization. Besides a fear of the consequences, according to one respondent, it is also in the character of diplomats:

> *"Giving feedback, we are not good at that. It's in all our reports. It's hard to address each other. That's also because of the kind of people we hire. We are all diplomats. We are in an accommodating mode, in which we have to reconcile different positions. We are not conflict seekers. Giving feedback is not conflict-seeking, but it is perceived that way. We are trying to keep the peace, we are focused on good relationships and harmony. That's diplomacy. You do business with other countries, that's what we have to rely on. We have that in our*

genes. That's the kind of people who work here. No pushers. No market vendors. "

Passive racism normalizes racism

Passive racism does not help reinforce the norm of non-discrimination. When bystanders do not intervene when they see racism in their vicinity, a normalization of racism occurs. This may even lead to people feeling more space to act racist (Broekroelofs & Felten, 2020; Crandall, Eshleman, & O'Brien, 2002). In other words, passivity perpetuates racism. Also, experiences of passive racism create feelings of disappointment. It makes experiences of racism especially painful because people perceive that they cannot count on support from others. It makes them feel that they are on their own. As a result, the minority seems to be the problem owner, while everyone should feel responsible for propagating the norm of non-discrimination. Several employees refer to this as a burden, as victims who respond to racism are quickly labeled a "whiny person" or an "angry" or "oversensitive" bi-cultural employee. One respondent experiences a dilemma in this. On the one hand, she says she does not need others to stand up for her, because she is not "pathetic." On the other hand, it can actually have a lot of impact when white colleagues speak out.

Executives do not intervene sufficiently

The social norm of non-discrimination is also insufficiently propagated by executives. There appear to be limited corrective mechanisms. While some respondents perceive that their manager acknowledges racism, condemns it and offers support, many others express disappointment that managers do not act on racism. When employees share experiences, racism is typically condemned in words but not acted upon. No concrete action follows the reports or it is not dealt with satisfactorily.

"I was asked by a high-ranking employee to share racist experiences. You make yourself vulnerable by doing that and then you are asked to do it again with another high-ranking employee. Afterward, there is no feedback as to what they do with it. Then you do get discouraged."

Thus, with some exceptions, employees lack the support and understanding of their supervisors. This makes some employees feel that managers are pretending to speak out or simply do not realize the seriousness of the issues. Such passivity perpetuates racism. In a few cases, employees cannot turn to supervisors because they themselves were the ones who had acted racist. Sometimes experiences are also downplayed by supervisors by noting that the colleague in question "shouldn't be so difficult" or should "stop whining." As one employee points out, it is not appreciated. One respondent stated that managers deliberately "cover it up."

In one situation, a deployed white employee at an embassy indicated that he did not want to talk to someone because he was "black." This was accepted by the ambassador.

When another colleague wanted to file a report about this, it was "actively" stopped by the ambassador. That person was then threatened that such action would lead to "consequences."

Little trust in leadership contributes to self-censorship

The lack of measures and actions among executives results in cynicism and little confidence in the proper handling of reports. It is completely unclear what actions, if any, are taken. Consequently, many employees do not find it useful (any longer) to share experiences with supervisors or management. It is mentioned that there is also no safe working environment to share experiences of racism. Employees are very reluctant to use the word "racism" at all because, as we indicated earlier, it is perceived as a serious accusation. The absence of a feedback culture and the presence of a culture of diplomacy complicate matters even more. Certainly, locally hired employees would be "conditioned to speak socially desirable", "turn a blind eye and laugh" and apply "self-censorship." Some staff would only bring it up when racist behavior takes on very serious forms or persists for a long time.

Both bi-cultural and locally hired employees also fear that sharing racist experiences could adversely affect their career opportunities within the organization. Whereas bi-cultural employees fear their opportunities for advancement, locally hired employees fear possible dismissal. Several respondents speak of a "culture of fear." Several respondents argue that this fear is also justified, as it has actually been damaging in the past for several employees who have spoken out. One locally hired employee notes the following in this regard:

> *"Our trust has been broken. The Dutch always say they are direct, but they don't like it when others are direct with them. And especially with our temporary contracts, you're better off staying quiet."*

Another locally hired employee also concluded that it is unwise to speak out because it could have consequences for your employment.

Seeking support from peers

Instead of telling their supervisor, employees prefer to share it in confidence with their colleagues with whom they do feel safe. In those conversations, they also sometimes give each other advice on how to deal with these experiences. Sharing experiences sometimes provides support and comfort. The downside is that low willingness to report does not help to actively propagate the social norm of non-discrimination.

All in all, there is a high barrier for employees to discuss racism with supervisors for several reasons. The unequal power relations and dependency relationship towards the employer

is one of the main reasons that people conceal negative experiences, as they care about maintaining their job, income and career prospects (cf. Omlo, 2020).

Fear of condemning racism among aggrieved people

For that matter, employees also sometimes find it difficult to address the person who is guilty of racism. Because the organization does not have a feedback culture, there is a reluctance to address people about their behavior because the colleague in question may be their supervisor in the future. There is a fear that voicing feedback could be used against people at a later time, and with feedback about racism, this plays even more strongly. Moreover, employees do not want to create a negative atmosphere. Furthermore, the workplace is a place where people stay structurally, so colleagues are to some extent condemned to each other and dependent on each other in the working relationship.

Little urgency on behalf of the organization to address racism

Respondents further mentioned that the organization does not show enough urgency in putting combatting racism as a policy focal point on the agenda, in order to effectively combat and prevent racism. One mentioned that insufficient "structural safeguards" are deployed to prevent racism and that too few results are being achieved in fighting racism. Another finds a "system" lacking to combat racism and decisiveness to work toward an "anti-racist organization."

> *"There is no willingness at the ministry to tackle this problem at its roots. So many intentions have been expressed, but nothing has come of them. "*

Lack of checks and balances

Some respondents explained that embassies operate in a "totally shielded and isolated environment" which results in less control. There are also no "checks and balances." As a result, employees are less likely than in The Hague to be called to account for misconduct. With "good managers" this is not a problem, but it is a major problem with "poorly functioning managers." As a result, problems can "go on unpleasantly for a very long time." Whether racism is addressed varies greatly by the embassy and depends in part on which MT sits there.

Exit interviews sometimes lack

Another problem, according to those involved, is that exit interviews do not always take place. Nor is there yet a system in which the reports of these interviews are stored centrally and used as an analytical tool. This limits the organization's ability to gain a keen insight into motives why employees leave their job and receive feedback on how to retain people.

4.5 Absence of a well-functioning complaint procedure

Another mechanism that perpetuates racism is the lack of a functioning complaint procedure. A professional complaint procedure contributes to fair processes within an organization and can be a safeguard against institutional racism (Felten, et al., 2021). It allows employees to be heard and taken seriously. It is also an opportunity for organizations to learn from complaints, as it provides insight into bottlenecks and provides concrete indications for improvements (Fermin, et al., 2021; National Ombudsman, 2021).

Few reports of racism

A focus group and some interviews indicate that within the organization few reports of racism are received. According to some respondents, this leads some to assume that the problem of racism within the organization is negligible. However, research literature shows that willingness to report discrimination is generally much lower than perceived discrimination (Andriessen, et al., 2020; Omlo & Butter, 2020; Omlo, 2020).[15] Given the many shared experiences of racism in the interviews and the perception that this is a structural problem, the low number of reports is more likely a sign that the complaints procedure is not working well (cf. Fermin, et al., 2021).

Respondents are expressing criticism of the reporting structure. One respondent blames the organization for not questioning themselves how it is possible that so few reports come in. It gives him the impression that the ministry employs an "avoidance strategy": since no experiences are shared, it doesn't exist and we don't have to do anything about it.

Lack of trust in confidants

Employees experience a high barrier to sharing their experiences with confidants, integrity coordinators and human resources staff for various reasons. The explanation is that there is little confidence in them. Some mention that shared experiences in the past has not been kept confidential. Several employees are aware of leaks and they also warn other colleagues not to share their experiences.

> *"I have never trusted in confidants. Supposedly anonymous. They claim to work independently."*

[15] Researchers at the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) estimate that only three percent of victims with discrimination experiences actually report them (Andriessen, 2020).

"I was warned by several people who said: don't bring it up to the confidant, because it never stays confidential, so don't do that. I did have one experience myself where it didn't stay confidential."

Respondents also felt that little or nothing was done with their experiences and that it was not taken seriously enough. People do not feel heard and become disappointed. Some respondents pointed out that the powers of confidential advisors are limited and that this limits their ability to do anything for the reporter. They are there to listen and help think about possible steps. Even in that guidance, however, things do not always go well. For example, several employees have experienced having their experiences doubted. That is embarrassing, but it is also a huge barrier to reporting again in the future. One respondent even received a reproachful reaction and therefore concluded that reporting "makes no sense at all." The conversation with the confidant gave another employee the feeling that she was talking to "a wall."

As we saw earlier, the taboo of talking about racism also plays a role here. It feels like a heavy accusation, so people do not feel the space to tell their stories. Another factor is the fear that the other person will not recognize it as racism, but rather deny or relativize it. People do not want to be seen as a "victim" or "nagger" who "whines." One respondent stated that confidants do not understand racism and do not know how to deal with it. They are unable to provide a safe environment. Some employees fear that sharing experiences may negatively impact their careers within the organization. A few respondents mentioned that they lack bi-cultural confidants or confidants with demonstrable knowledge of diversity and inclusion. If existing confidants do have such knowledge, it would help to clearly state this expertise on the intranet. With such confidants, they would feel more trust and understanding.

A final problem mentioned about confidants is their accessibility. The limited number of shared experiences is, according to some respondents, due to unfamiliarity about where to find confidants. This would be unclear to many employees.

Criticism of integrity coordinators

With integrity coordinators, the procedure works differently. A report may be followed by an investigation. This also creates a barrier for some because it is then "out in the open." Yet, for unclear reasons, this procedure is not always followed. When an employee reported racism to integrity coordinators on behalf of a colleague, no action followed:

"It's always like this. When you make a report to Foreign Affairs and then when you check to see if something has been done about it, it turns out that nothing has been done. As an integrity agency, you should go to that department after such a report and talk to people and investigate, but Foreign Affairs people are busy with all kinds of things.

So that didn't happen. (...) It kind of shows the laxity of Foreign Affairs to deal with this kind of thing."

Like the confidant, the integrity coordinator is not easy to find. Information is not clear and the coordinators are not visible enough. It is unclear to people who to go to if something happens to them. While this is a general problem, it is important to mention because it further reinforces the already low willingness to report racism.

Criticism of human resources

There is also distrust toward human resources among several respondents. One respondent experienced confidential information being leaked about experiences of racism. A former employee mentions that she did have a good conversation with a human resources employee, but the follow-up disappointed her:

"I discussed it with human resources. I confided in them about the issue. But it stopped at one conversation. I had a good conversation in itself, but it was unfortunate.... I would have liked to have a follow-up. That they would have told me: we are learning from it or that they would tell me what they did with it. Because of that, I feel damaged. It was not closed properly to my feeling. Maybe something was done with it behind the scenes. I haven't heard anything about it. If there had been, I would have had better closure."

Criticism of inspection

Finally, two respondents mentioned bottlenecks with regard to internal inspection. One respondent mentioned that although actions can be taken as a result of inspections, the disadvantage is that the inspection only visits an embassy once every four years. A high-ranking employee mentions that locally hired staff also lack confidence that anything is done in The Hague after inspection rounds. Because of this distrust, they feel no need to report experiences with racism. This also applies to managers, because they want to avoid being seen as a "bad manager" who has "allowed" racism. Inspections, according to this respondent, are not an adequate tool for detecting racism.

Well-functioning reporting structure lacking

Overall, a functioning infrastructure for reporting racism is lacking. The complaint procedure does not help to understand the racism problem and learn how to better combat racism. Thus, this perpetuates the problem rather than utilizing the reporting structure to effectively combat and prevent racism.

4.6 Absence of an inclusive organizational culture

In Chapter 3, we described that many employees adopt a conforming coping strategy. This is largely due to the organizational culture from which there is a strong pressure to conform or assimilate to the organizational culture of the majority.

> *"Assimilation is expected. The assimilation pressure is there. To the Foreign Affairs culture, you have to adapt. You do have to be expected to conform to what the typical Foreign Affairs person is like. It's not like Foreign Affairs is open to all these different types of people. They do hire different people because it's also expected to have more diversity, but once in, you have to fit the mold into what the Foreign Affairs person is expected to look like."*

> *"People are forced into a straitjacket, which I think is also a form of violence. You force someone to conform. You are the norm and you just confirm that you are the norm. I found that so intimidating. I find that sameness very strange, especially when you as a ministry lecture other countries about tolerance, minority rights, LGBT and the multicultural society and that we still live pleasantly with different groups here. That contrasts so strongly with having to conform to codes and unwritten rules. Those are those contradictions that I found so wonderful. If you don't adapt, you don't count."*

Adjustments needed for social acceptance

Pressure for employees to conform acts as a barrier to inclusion and a safe work environment as it does not give people the space to be themselves and be valued for it (cf. Ashikali et al., 2020; Holck, 2016). There is conditional inclusion since people only count and participate fully when they conform. Pressure also limits people's ability to feel at home because they cannot be themselves. In other words, an inclusive organizational culture is missing.

As we briefly touched on earlier, adaptation is necessary to be accepted and belong. Those who deviate from the norm are more likely to encounter the forms of racism described in Chapter 3, including cultural racism. Conversely, one respondent sees that racism also functions as a "tool" to force conformity to the "monoculture." For example, nasty jokes would be an expression of this monoculture and used to "push people into the mold." Some respondents note that assimilation is also inadequate because bi-cultural Dutch people never quite fit in.

"You have to meet certain conditions to be fully accepted. I don't think this is specifically Foreign Affairs. It's a nationwide, Dutch problem. You are never really a Dutchman. You can integrate all you want as a Moroccan Dutchman or Turkish Dutchman, but you will never be seen as a full-fledged Dutchman."

Adjustments needed to grow

Earlier, it was briefly mentioned that cultural preservation limits employee advancement opportunities. Thus, adaptation is imperative for advancement. One respondent tells of an ambassador who once addressed a group with the message that "conformism is the way to the top." The top is far away for people who do not conform. Usually, it is not expressed so openly and is more something employees experience when they do not conform. Then they are more likely to be "antagonized" and "punished."

Although the pressure to conform applies to everyone, it generally requires more effort for bi-cultural and locally hired employees than for the average white employee. They generally enjoy an advantage, because of their cultural background and access to certain networks, they are already familiar with many social codes. They can grasp the manners at the ministry faster and make them their own (cf. Luyendijk, 2022).

Adaptation to Dutch norms and values

The expectation or unspoken norm that assimilation and conformity to the organizational culture are desired is expressed in several ways. To begin with, it requires an adaptation to certain Dutch norms and values since the ministry is "typically Dutch," which creates pressure to reject or abandon deviant cultures:

"At Foreign Affairs, visibility is very important in our work, though. There is a certain dominant culture that requires people to be very explicit about everything they do and to always be visible in meetings, and in certain cultures, these things are not very important. (...) A colleague with a non-Western background said to me: Foreign Affairs asks things of you that you sometimes cannot and do not want to do. Not wanting to do them has to do with your cultural background. Not being able to, is also often because something is expected of you that does not fit your personality or cultural background."

Adaptation to corporate culture

Others argue that it is necessary to conform to the culture of the group having influence in order to continue to grow. It is also regularly noted that there is a "corporate culture" with many "unwritten rules." If you don't know these rules, you don't belong. According to several respondents, this does not make the organization inclusive. There is little room for

contradiction, according to several respondents. One respondent mentioned the policy term "loyal contradiction" as typical in this context: it should not be too confrontational.

Adaptation by letting go of Islamic customs

The expectation to adapt can also be seen in concrete situations. For example, a staff member was pressured to eat along instead of fasting because of an important visit. In a more informal setting, there was social pressure to eat meat from the grill, even though it included pork which is not common for people of Islamic background. A senior staff member recounted that two colleagues wearing headscarves were told that they would get much further in the organization without one. Others were criticized for their colorful clothing or, on the contrary, too conservative clothing.

4.7 Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, we raised the question of whether institutional racism also exists within the State Department. This occurs when "the processes, policies and rules (written and unwritten) of institutions lead to structural inequality between people of different backgrounds, skin color or religion." This involves two types of rules or processes: (1) "rules or processes that explicitly differentiate and intend to create inequality, and (2) rules or processes (written or unwritten) that do not explicitly differentiate between groups, but in practice cause one group to be disadvantaged and another group to be advantaged" (Felten, et al., 2021, p. 7).

Institutional racism can be found both in formal, written rules and in the more informal rules expressed in organizational culture (Fermin, et al. 2021). Since we did not analyze formal policies, the focus of this exploration was on unwritten, informal rules. In this chapter, we found several processes and mechanisms in organizational culture that enable, perpetuate and exacerbate (institutional) racism. In any case, there are insufficient safeguards against racism.

Unfair processes in the enrollment

When hiring new staff, legally prohibited rejections occur in which employees are judged unsuitable for a position because of their ethnicity. Suspicious and inappropriate questions are also asked in job interviews. Another problem is favoritism, that is, employees are blinded to candidates who have gone through a similar educational path as the average white employee within the organization. Furthermore, tokenism has been pointed out. This means that bi-cultural employees are hired purely for symbolic reasons to project an image that the organization takes diversity and inclusion seriously.

Unfair processes in career advancement

Many staff in The Hague and expatriate staff at embassies - including white staff - conclude that lack of conformism and assimilation to certain norms of behavior within the organization is a major reason why career advancement stalls. When employees cling too much to cultural backgrounds, they limit their career opportunities. In addition, the "old boys network", "favoritism" and the mutual assignment of great jobs to colleagues they remember from their former sorority limit the advancement opportunities of many bi-cultural employees. Furthermore, respondents find that they have to work much harder than white colleagues to prove their suitability for advancement. Sometimes low expectations and prejudice play into why bi-cultural employees do not advance.

Unfair processes that contribute to resignation

For some employees, the assimilation pressure and perceived lack of advancement opportunities are reasons for leaving the organization. As a result, people do not feel at home and are disappointed that there seem to be few opportunities for advancement. Another concern is the weak legal status of ambassadors' domestic staff and the risk that they could be fired relatively easily. Furthermore, several locally hired employees are afraid to criticize and contradict their supervisor because they fear dismissal.

Absence of a strong social norm of non-discrimination

That many employees experience and perceive racism widely indicates an organizational (sub)culture in which there is a certain space for employees to express themselves racially. In this regard, we have seen in this chapter that respondents indicate that the majority do not recognize racism as a problem within the organization. Indeed, when employees discuss experiences of racism, there is a tendency to downplay, trivialize or deny such experiences. Moreover, employees experience that their colleagues rarely intervene when they witness racism. They also feel that managers do not take sufficient action against racism. Respondents see little urgency within the organization to agenda and combat racism as a policy focal point. All this indicates the absence of a strong social norm of non-discrimination. Felten (et al., 2021) points out that the absence of such a norm encourages (institutional) racism. Indeed, employees are less likely to act racist if they perceive that this is clearly disapproved by the organization and its employees.

Absence of a functioning complaint procedure

Another mechanism that perpetuates racism is the lack of a functioning complaint procedure. A professional complaint procedure contributes to fair processes within an organization and can be a safeguard against institutional racism (Felten, et al., 2021). It allows employees to be heard and taken seriously. It is also an opportunity for organizations to learn from complaints, as it offers insight into bottlenecks and provides leads for making improvements (Fermin, et al., 2021; National Ombudsman, 2021). In this chapter, however, we saw that the complaints procedure does not work well. There is a low willingness to

report because people have little confidence in the handling of reports with integrity and professionalism. Mentioned issues include lack of accessibility, not feeling heard sufficiently and not treating reports confidentially.

Absence of an inclusive organizational culture

The pressure to conform and assimilate to the organizational culture indicates the absence of an inclusive culture within the ministry. The inclusion of employees is conditional. Adaptation of employees is necessary because it increases the likelihood of social acceptance and advancement opportunities.

Not racism and evil intentions everywhere

Thus, in conclusion, there is institutional racism at the ministry. The various mechanisms offer an explanation for the fact that many employees experience structural racism and for the existence of diverse patterns of racism. This does not mean that racism is found in every corner of the organization and that all employees are guilty of it. We already saw in Chapter 3 that respondents indicated that, in addition to racism, they maintained pleasant relationships with colleagues and had good experiences within certain teams. Institutional racism also does not necessarily mean that there is always evil intent. Some processes may also be indicative of blind spots and stem, among other things, from action shyness and unconscious prejudice.

Based on this study, we cannot draw any conclusions as to whether there are any formal, written rules that cause inequality between people of different ethnic backgrounds, skin color and/or religions. Since no research was conducted on formal policies, we do not know if there are any formal policies that explicitly and deliberately discriminate between ethnic groups. No direct evidence of this was found, but we cannot rule it out either.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

In this final chapter, we broadly cover the main conclusions. This is followed by several recommendations. We conclude by making several suggestions for follow-up research.

5.1 Conclusions

This exploratory research focused on the vague question of the extent to which employees believe racism exists within the State Department and in what ways it is expressed. To answer this question, a qualitative study was conducted among bi-cultural employees in The Hague and at the embassies and among locally hired employees of color. The added value of the chosen qualitative research strategy is that it provided the opportunity to uncover patterns of racism and underlying mechanisms and processes.

The study shows that bi-cultural employees and locally hired employees of color experience different forms of racism. Among other things, they encounter verbal abuse, derogatory treatment, cultural racism, and a variety of accusations and suspicions. Employees also suffer from sometimes being passed over, ignored, and excluded. They experience racist jokes and low expectations as to what they are capable of doing as professionals. They also feel that some of their white colleagues see them as "the ethnic and cultural other" and not as a full-fledged Dutchman or equal colleague. We also saw the emphasis on people's ethnic and cultural background in the loyalty discourse: employees' loyalty is questioned because of their background. Furthermore, employees are bothered by the way stigmatizing language is used about different ethnic groups.

The conclusion that there are various patterns of racism and that many of the respondents perceive racism as a structural problem raises the question of whether institutional racism also exists. We conclude that there is. In fact, we found several processes and mechanisms within the (culture of the) organization that provides room for racism and insufficient safeguards to prevent racism. In doing so, we distinguished six mechanisms, namely:

1) Unfair processes in the enrollment;
2) Unfair processes in career advancement;
3) Unfair processes that contribute to resignation;
4) Absence of a strong social norm of non-discrimination;
5) Absence of a well-functioning complaint procedure;
6) Absence of an inclusive organizational culture.

Institutional racism does not mean that racism can be found in every corner of the organization and that all employees are guilty of it. Rather, respondents report that in addition to racism, they have pleasant relationships with colleagues and good experiences within certain teams. Moreover, there are also differences between different directorates and embassies. Institutional racism also does not necessarily mean evil intentions all the time. Some exclusionary mechanisms may also be blind spots and may stem from, among other things, the inability to act adequately and unconscious biases.

The qualitative nature of the study means that we do not have figures on the extent to which various forms of racism occur. On the other hand, many employees themselves experience the problem as structural. Moreover, we distinguished patterns of racism and mechanisms in the organizational culture that indicate institutional racism. These are also recognized by interviewed white experts and bystanders. This combination of findings makes it plausible to assume that the problems are structural in nature, are embedded in the organization, and thus also play out for a broader group of employees not spoken to in this study.

We consider the findings serious and worrisome. First, because racism is harmful to the employees who experience it. These experiences can lead to stress, negative emotions and reduced well-being. This can be detrimental to their performance and confidence in the organization and colleagues. Also, many employees choose to work extra hard, behave in an extra friendly and exemplary manner, and adapt culturally to the organizational culture. These forms of overcompensation are demanding and require a lot of extra energy from employees. The pressure to conform and the lack of opportunities for advancement also increase the risk that the ministry will lose high-functioning employees in the future.

Second, racism is detrimental to the ministry's work. The results show a clear discrepancy between the ministry's mission - to help build a just world with opportunity, freedom and dignity for all - and workplace practices. The credibility and image of the ministry is at stake.

5.2 Recommendations

The recommendations are largely based on the respondents' own suggested solutions. It should be emphasized that the recommendations below do not provide a complete answer as to how the organization can effectively combat racism. Since this research is an exploratory study, the recommendations provide an initial overview of potentially appropriate measures. The recommendations represent a preliminary answer to the question of what the ministry could do to successfully prevent and combat various forms of

racism. Making science-based recommendations with attention to effective interventions requires due diligence and is a study in itself. Nonetheless, we do supplement some of the respondents' recommendations based on the main findings of the study and a limited number of relevant insights from the scientific literature.

1. Take the signals from this current research seriously

Respondents emphasize the importance of taking the signals from this research seriously. They have already been disappointed several times in the organization because nothing was done after they made themselves vulnerable by sharing their experiences with supervisors, confidants and other employees. This encourages cynicism and little faith in the ministry's willingness to make organizational changes. According to respondents, if no action is attached to the research, there is a risk that employees will become even more reluctant to share experiences of racism out of the belief that nothing will be done with them anyway. It is very important, according to respondents, to provide aftercare for aggrieved employees who relive situations and suffer because of this investigation.

Based on the results of the survey and the suggestions of respondents, we too recommend that the ministry take the signals from the research seriously by acknowledging the problems and attaching concrete action points to the research. This is desperately needed to (re)gain the trust of employees, break through the cynicism and dissatisfaction in the workplace and stop the resignation of employees. One such action point should focus on making the research discussable within the organization. Constructive dialogue in the form of reflection sessions is necessary to interpret the significance of the investigation for the organization. Involve aggrieved persons in these conversations as well, learn from their experiential knowledge and insights and involve them in formulating appropriate solution approaches. In addition, it is advisable to already formulate some concrete actions or ambitions in the short term. By doing so, ministry leadership can send a strong signal that it does not tolerate racism.

Furthermore, based on the findings of this study, it is important to develop a new vision of diversity & inclusion and combatting racism. In this study, it has become clear that, in practice, ethnic and cultural diversity is still too often approached as a risk and threat and too little as an opportunity and a potential strength. In a new vision, it is important to explicitly distance themselves from this and, on the contrary, to recognize and value cultural differences. Respondents themselves indicate that the organization could actually use cultural differences in a positive way. Diversity is still too often seen as a moral obligation or as a form of positive discrimination. The organization could gain more strategic advantage from diversity for Dutch diplomacy. Respondents point out that the focus on a possible lack of loyalty causes the organization to overlook the fact that bi-cultural and locally hired employees often have specific skills and qualities that are useful to the organization. These might include culture-sensitive working, international orientation,

ability to build bridges between countries and different ethnic groups, command of multiple languages, access to hard-to-reach networks and affinity for certain local issues. The following recommendations can contribute to developing a more concrete and broader elaboration of a vision.

2. *Actively convey the standard of non-discrimination*

Respondents feel that supervisors do not take sufficient corrective action or commit any actions at all when they hear instances of racism. In fact, some of the managers and other colleagues rather tend to deny and downplay experiences of racism. This does not contribute to acknowledging the issues and setting clear standards. It is therefore important to respondents that there are consequences - such as warnings and sanctions - for employees who are guilty of racism and that this is enforced. In addition, employees feel it is important that colleagues intervene if they witness a racist event.

In addition, respondents advocate rewarding desired behavior through incentives. Managers should substantiate in evaluation interviews how they contribute to diversity and inclusion, how they make the subject discussable within the team and what improvements they want to make in the future. Executives should be judged on how diverse the part of the organization they lead is. Those who score well should be rewarded for this. Executives who fail to invest in this or invest insufficiently should be subject to sanctions, according to respondents.

The above suggestions from respondents align with the importance of the presence of a strong social norm of non-discrimination and that it is actively promoted within the ministry. It is known from research that racist actions by employees can be reduced by a clear standard-setting that racism will not be tolerated within the organization.

Communicating the standard of non-discrimination is not only a responsibility of the executives. As respondents also point out, it is also important for bystanders to intervene. Indeed, bystander interventions also contribute to setting a social norm that can have a preventive effect. After all, if employees have the impression that colleagues disapprove of such behavior and that this behavior is not socially accepted, they are less likely to engage in racism (Broekroelofs & Felten, 2020; Crandall, Eshleman & O'brien, 2002; Fermin, et al. 2021). All this will eventually contribute to a cultural shift with more social safety, both for employees who experience racism and for bystanders who feel more space to dare to speak out against racism. Where racism is now primarily a problem that minority groups must find a way to deal with, it can thus become more and more a responsibility of the dominant majority group to combat it. The leadership can encourage this process by developing policies aimed at activating bystanders. Based on the results of the study, we further recommend working toward a more inclusive organizational culture. The pressure to

conform and assimilate restricts people from being themselves and feeling at home within the organization.

Promoting the norm of non-discrimination is also important in a broader sense. The ministry's mission is to contribute to a just world with opportunity, freedom and dignity for all. The ministry's effectiveness hinges on how it implements and complies with these norms within its own organization. The discrepancy between the principle of equality and the vision of the ministry on the one hand and on the other the practice of everyday racism in the workplace must be closed. Respondents themselves also stress that precisely because of its diplomacy in different parts of the world and advocacy for human rights, the State Department should be a forerunner in promoting diversity and inclusion.

3. Invest in employee training

It is known from research that the professionalization of employees through training and education can provide an important safeguard for fair trials and against arbitrariness and unequal treatment (Broeklofs & Felten, 2020; Fermin, et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important to invest in civil service skills. Respondents also advocate for this. An option could be training courses aimed at constructively dealing with (unconscious) prejudices, culture-sensitive working and respectful treatment of bi-cultural and locally hired employees. But also, for example, through master classes focusing on the meaning and impact of racism and how both aggrieved persons and bystanders can respond to racism. The importance of arranging courses in which giving feedback and open communication are the central topics is also mentioned in this context. According to respondents, training courses are important for employees from all levels of the organization. If managers and human resources employees also participate in training courses, they underline that they consider it important. Specific training aimed at the recruitment and retention of bi-cultural staff is also important for these groups of employees.

Although training is already taking place, according to employees there are still several improvements to be made. For example, some respondents stressed that it is important that training is not limited to a few meetings, because otherwise the insights gained will not be applied sufficiently in practice and an effective change process cannot be started. The training sessions must therefore be given a prominent and structural place in the training program. Respondents also feel that the existing offerings are still too non-committal. Partly because of this, employees who could play a major role in combating racism do not participate. It is, therefore, necessary to make the training courses more mandatory. Finally, respondents feel that the training should more often have a strong scientific basis. In this context, it is also mentioned that the training should be evaluated scientifically.

4. Invest in professionalizing reporting structure

The study found several bottlenecks in the reporting procedures that offer an important explanation as to why employees are reluctant or unwilling to report experiences of racism to confidants, integrity coordinators, human resources staff and the inspectorate. Respondents value being able to report to a professional who understands them and who has specific knowledge and expertise on issues of racism, diversity and inclusion. This, according to respondents, requires training for staff and placing a high emphasis on knowledge and experience with the topic of diversity and inclusion when recruiting new staff.

That there are few complaints about racism is not a reason to sit back with satisfaction. On the contrary, it is a reason to make the reporting procedure more accessible and simple. Other employees are more in need of professional complaint handling: offering a listening ear without questioning experiences, a guarantee that the information will be kept confidential, linking concrete actions to a report and offering feedback on what was done with the report.

There are different procedures and formal and informal channels for sharing experiences of racism. According to respondents, it is important that these channels reinforce and complement each other. Unnecessary fragmentation should be avoided, as this can hinder a coherent picture of the issue and how to address it. Moreover, it is not clear to everyone which points of contact they can turn to for what, and what follow-up steps can be taken after a report. Employees need to be better informed about this.

Information about the possibilities for external reporting is also important, respondents stated. External reporting can be a good alternative for employees because it can offer them more security given the lack of trust that currently exists concerning complaint handlers. In this respect, it is also mentioned that experts at an independent and external hotline could advise employees. Furthermore, such a hotline should have the possibility to formulate recommendations for the ministry based on reports.

Finally, in addition to the respondents' recommendations, we recommend that the ministry learns from reports that are being made. This requires proper registration so that a clear picture of the nature and extent of complaints is available. When listening to reports, it is important to ask what employees themselves want to achieve with them. After all, people may have different wishes as to what is done with the complaint (cf. Fermin, 2021).

5. Invest in more inclusive recruitment and selection policies

To make recruitment and selection procedures fair and to reduce the negative impact of prejudice, respondents make several suggestions. Suggestions include actively recruiting bi-cultural talent at universities, applying target numbers or quotas, organizing more

diversity in application committees and allowing anonymous applications. It may also help to tailor the recruitment message to potential bi-cultural employees, gain more knowledge about the impact of bias during job interviews, pay more attention to culturally-sensitive action during recruitment and selection, apply a (more) standardized method of recruitment and selection and formats when conducting job interviews, in order to minimize the impact of bias. It is further important to train employees in conducting job interviews and selecting candidates with specific attention to how they can recognize and deal with their own biases.

The above recommendations mainly contribute to better hiring. According to respondents, the problems in career advancement are greater. More diversity in high-profile positions and better representation at the top and in management teams is badly needed, according to those involved, to prevent disappointed employees from leaving. Employee advancement is also valuable because they can act as role models for others. To enhance equal growth opportunities, it is suggested that early management programs be put in place for language-savvy bi-cultural employees and mentoring programs. In addition, it is indicated that it would be just if locally hired employees were also given more and more frequent opportunities to serve on the management team and grow within the organization.

6. Work on building the trust of locally hired employees

The next recommendation is to reverse the perceived distrust among locally hired employees of color as much as possible. Respondents indicated that the ministry should proactively approach embassies to figure out what is going on rather than waiting for reports of racism to come in. In other words, be outreaching and invest in relationships with locally hired staff. According to respondents, it is crucial to remove the feeling that locally hired employees are inferior and offer them appreciation and recognition for the work they do. Furthermore, it is important to clearly explain the reasons for not inviting locally hired employees to informal and formal affairs in certain cases. Finally, it is indicated that the ease with which domestic workers can be fired should be modified.

7. Strengthen the learning capacity of the organization

The organization's learning capacity with regard to promoting diversity and inclusion and countering racism can be strengthened in several ways. First, according to respondents, it is important to consistently conduct exit interviews with employees who leave the organization. In the case of local and bi-cultural employees, it is then important to consider the extent to which experiences of racism played a role in the decision to leave the organization. Exit interviews not only provide insights into employee departure motives. It is also an opportunity to receive feedback on how to retain people and other recommendations that can help prevent and address racism. In this respect, it is important to record and analyze the outcomes of such interviews anonymously.

In addition to exit interviews, respondents advocate conducting trend analyses and monitors in which figures and trends on diversity in enrollment, career advancement and resignation are visualized. Because of the GDPR legislation, it is not possible to record figures on the ethnicity of employees. Alternative options have therefore been mentioned to track it in other ways. For example, if employees give permission, figures can be kept by management teams based on anonymous self-identification.

Respondents further advocate for evaluations of the actions set up in the coming period. An evaluation of the effectiveness of training and other interventions or the effects of the ministry's diversity policy could be considered.

In addition to these recommendations from respondents, we recommend that the ministry also learns from other organizations that have experience with policies aimed at promoting diversity and inclusion and combating racism and its implementation and evaluation. It can also learn from existing research.

5.3 Suggestions for follow-up research

Like any study, this exploratory study has limitations. For example, this study did not deal with the racist experiences of people working in cleaning, kitchen and security. These employees are not employed by the ministry. Different dynamics may be occurring as a result. In addition, the exploration focused on experiences of racism of aggrieved people. It is important to find out how themes such as diversity, inclusion and racism are thought of in the broader organization and that this includes attention to the perspective of white employees. Below we list some specific follow-up studies that may be relevant to the organization:

- Action research in which the outcomes of the current research are used to reflect with stakeholders on implications and appropriate change tasks;
- Research how colleagues who witness racism react and what they need in order to intervene (more often) and offer support to aggrieved persons;
- Research on how executives deal with racism and what they need in order to better identify issues and provide appropriate support;
- A literature review of effective interventions to combat racism based on national and international literature;
- Research on other groups of employees who have experiences of unequal treatment and prejudice, e.g., LGBT, people with disabilities, diverse religious backgrounds (including Jews, Hindus, Christians)
- A quantitative study of experienced and perceived patterns of racism.

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Appendix 1 Terms of Reference

Exploratory study – Racism in the workplace

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Date: March 9, 2022

Background information

1. Background

Anti-racism is part of the State Department's (BZ) ambitions in the areas of diversity and inclusiveness. The urgency of this theme is underscored by, among other things:

- Questions from the ministry on topics such as: how does BZ relate to the public discussion on racism and decolonization?
- The childcare allowance scandal (Toeslagenaffaire) that sheds light on the consequences of the situation of exclusion based on race, ethnicity and origin within the government.
- Research in Dutch municipalities that makes it clear that institutional racism in the labor market is significant. It can be assumed that this is also an issue that occurs within the Ministry of BZ - both at the department in The Hague and at Dutch posts abroad.
- The recent appointment of a national anti-discrimination coordinator: timely moment to align with interdepartmental ambitions.
- The international Black Lives Matter movement.

As part of the advancement and implementation of the established D&I policy, it was decided to conduct further research on racism at the State Department. The Executive Council has expressed and committed to this research and process.

Objective

The objective of the study is threefold:

- To identify the various dimensions/characteristics of the racism phenomenon as experienced within BZ (and possibly before entering BZ)
- To identify the perceived extent of the problem as experienced both at the department in The Hague and at the posts
- Making concrete recommendations to address the problem, reduce it and contribute to more diversity, inclusion, etc.

Scope

This study looks for patterns of racism in the workplace. The focus is not on the actions of individual employees. The exploration focuses on both employees in The Hague and at the missions.

Research questions

The research answers two main questions: (i) To what extent do officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs believe that racism exists within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (including the posts) and in what ways does this manifest itself? And (ii) According to officials, how can racism within the organization be prevented and reduced?

In collaboration between researcher and client, these main questions will be further developed at the beginning of the study. The exploration will provide lessons or recommendations for what can be done within the Ministry of BZ to combat and prevent racism.

Methods

Qualitative research methods will be used to answer the above research questions. These include:

- Literature study, desk study (including a conceptual framework on the definition of racism, different forms of it and into experiences from other countries, perhaps also from other government agencies in the Netherlands)
- Interviews with different categories of respondents

Part of the research will be online (using Teams and other communication software).

Organization of the study

The investigation is being conducted on behalf of the Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Paul Huijts, represented by Arthur Kibbelaar.
An official steering committee for the preliminary investigation has been established. This group consists of officials from the relevant directorates departments and networks (TBD - max 10 persons) and functions under the chairmanship of Arthur Kibbelaar who is also the first point of contact for the researchers. The steering committee has primarily a supporting function: ensuring that the research can be carried out and runs smoothly (identifying officials to be interviewed, providing (contact) information to the researchers, etc.). The steering committee consults regularly with the researchers.

There is also a reference group. This is chaired by Arthur Kibbelaar and has internal and external members (TBD). The group's mandate is to: reflect on the findings and recommendations and the research findings that underlie them. The group meets twice

with the researchers: (i) halfway through the research about the state of affairs and a first impression of findings and (ii) for the presentation of the draft report, conclusions, recommendations and possible follow-up steps. The reference group has an advisory function; the researchers remain independent.

Implementation of the research will be outsourced to an expert party outside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This party has experience in conducting qualitative (policy) research; is independent and objective; has knowledge of and experience with the subject of the research; and knowledge of and experience in dealing with the ministerial context and dynamics. Protection of personal data will be provided.

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