



**First analysis of the  
experiences with  
and impact of  
discrimination and  
exclusion in three  
Rotterdam  
communities**

Report V.1

# Rotterdam voorbij discriminatie



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## Rotterdam beyond Discrimination

# First analysis of the experiences with and impact of discrimination and exclusion in three Rotterdam communities

Social capital is a measure of the strength of the social fabric that brings and keeps communities together and enables them to successfully advocate for shared interests. *Bonding* is one of its 'capital modes' and refers to the mutual trust, shared norms and degree of contact of people in a community with a shared identity (ethnicity, neighbourhood, religious belief) (Arneil, 2006). It is a measure of cohesion within a community.

*Bridging* refers to the ability to have contact outside one's own community, aimed at the realisation of a common interest. In line with this, the amount of *bridging 'capital'* is seen as a measure of cohesion within a society and of the impact of asserting oneself as a citizen of a society. *Linking* concerns the ability to do this in connection with those who have administrative or economic responsibility in society. The measure of *bonding* capital according to Putnam, one of the intellectual fathers of the concept, is the degree of mutual trust that people express in those who are close to them (neighbourhood/community) and the number of contacts they have with one another, through which they undertake initiatives to improve their joint position.

In the first phase of the Rotterdam Beyond Discrimination (RBD) project, it is all about strengthening the *bonding* capital: exchanging experiences with each other within the community regarding discrimination and exclusion, strengthening mutual trust and examining which steps need to be taken to make improvements. With this in mind, three meetings were organised with citizens of Rotterdam from the Jewish community, the Islamic community and the Black community. In this report, the results are presented per community.



## 1. THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

### 1.1. Experiences of violence

During the discussions, many of those involved reported experiences with anti-Jewish violence, or acknowledgement of such experiences. This can vary from explicit forms of aggression at street level based on outward characteristics, to being bullied as a 'Jew', which can involve (direct) negative behaviour, comments, insinuations or treatment because of your Jewishness. Such overt aggression is not a daily occurrence and whether this always involves violence is not a foregone conclusion for everyone. One participant speaks of 'negatively experienced approaches' and emphasises that this experience is coloured by one's own perception. Others point out that the description of the situation should not be too defensive and seem to indicate that the reduction of Jewish people to mere victims and objects is also undesirable. This does not apply to the implicit forms of anti-Semitism that are more frequently noted: "The violence is often used behind your back" (also: De Wit & Fiere, 2021). Experiences are shared about the education system, about discriminatory remarks by fellow pupils and about the failure of school boards to correct this. They talk about the anti-Semitism that they encounter in social media, about the chants on sports fields, about mocking compliments ("Maybe you should be the treasurer because you people are good with money") or about alleged Jewish networks and their infiltration of higher circles in society. Anti-Semitism stereotypes Jewish people and reduces them to objects that are used to reinforce one's own viewpoint. This also applies to philo-Semitism, described by Drayer (2014) as "the hypocritical twin of anti-Semitism", which is more often encountered in orthodox Christian circles and has its roots in the same disparaging thinking as anti-Semitism. One of the participants says that this crosses his path more often than anti-Semitism.

Bornstein (2004) sees both forms of indirect violence as symbolic or representative violence, which dehumanises people and attacks their core values and dignity. Galtung (1990) emphasises that the threat of violence must also be seen as violence that affects the symbolic parts of existence as expressed in religion, language, ideology, art, and knowledge. Like Bornstein, he considers this as a prelude to other forms of violence (direct and structural violence).

A major change seen in society is that anti-Jewish violence is becoming more socially acceptable again, for example in politics and in the opposition to the Covid-19 measures: "It is part of the current social climate and debate. This affects us and our experience, and defines it. This is relevant and is always changing. In the current political climate, we see anti-Semitism emerging in new guises." The reference to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in the Middle East requires separate attention. The experience is that members of the Jewish community are judged because of their Jewishness. This is experienced as a form of anti-Semitism, because its logic conflates the foundation of the State of Israel with their Jewishness. Not all Jewish people recognise themselves in this. Someone points out that "Israel" does not always refer to "that country in the Middle East", but is also a spiritual concept from which people derive guidance and comfort. In addition, "a black-and-white narrative" is placed over the conflict, which people experience as the unjustified 'whitening' of the Jewish community. Being judged for this, or only being allowed to have a say when one speaks out ("You have to carry a disclaimer"), is experienced as an unjust form of gatekeeping.

Where do these anti-Jewish sentiments come from? The sources lie in Christianity, one of the attendees believes, and from there it has transferred to the Islamic community (also Huttinga, 2018). Also the threat by the 'cosmopolitan' Jew of his own nationalistic sentiments, or the fear of the alleged double loyalty of Jewish people is seen as an explanation. The Jewish sociologist-philosopher Bauman, in his essay on modern man, points to the experience that Jewish people are culturally Other and constantly occupy an outside position within the imagined harmony of the human universe. Even in postmodern conceptions of the meaning of differences between people, the Jewish Other represents chaos that belongs nowhere and has access to knowledge that remains hidden from others. He undermines and infects this imagined



universe with ambivalence in which he is neither friend nor foe (Marotta, 2002). This also reveals one of the most important drivers of anti-Semitism: fear, fed by a lack of knowledge and contact and an ingrained resistance, according to one of the participants.

## 1.2 What does it do to people?

The fact that the experience of discrimination and exclusion affects people from the Jewish community 'in their core' is in line with the work of the Jewish philosopher Ido Abram, who lists the experience of 'war, persecution and survival' as one of the five defining characteristics of Jewish identity<sup>1</sup> (Abram, 2006, 2017). These are experiences that are not only felt individually but also collectively and across generations. Confrontation with anti-Semitism is an experience that paralyses, and this makes it difficult to react appropriately. Revealing oneself and not wanting to be seen are competing with each other. Some show resilience or try to change course. They prepare themselves for these confrontations. Anticipation and avoidance are typical responses to the constant threat of damage to one's essential sense of identity. Retreating into the role of a victim is rejected. This is precisely what evokes anti-Semitism.

Others look to the future and turn anger into action, e.g. reporting anti-Semitism, or *bonding* strategies within the Jewish community itself,

- a. by surrounding themselves with Jewish people or
- b. through a form of symbolic *bonding*, by deriving strength from Jewish identity, as a moral anchorage, as expressed, among other things, in the existence of the State of Israel.

Finally, there is also a critical interrogative approach especially from the younger participants in the discussion who point out that the Jewish community in the Netherlands seems to be stuck in remembering. They point out that although the recent Shoah was of a different order than earlier attempts to expel the Jewish community, the history of anti-Semitism goes back much further than the Holocaust. It is these young people who actually point out that anti-Semitism is endemic in Dutch society.

## 1.3 Who are the actors who must be addressed?

Addressing anti-Semitism is not primarily the responsibility of those affected by the violence. Many examples of anti-Semitism can be found in the education sector. Therefore, educational organisations seem to have a role to play in tackling it, as do sports clubs (especially football). In addition, there is the endemic anti-Semitism (and philo-Semitism) that manifests itself in beliefs that are legitimised by religious convictions, or feelings of nationalism and identity, and is also expressed in the media (including social media). The media are too often uncritical platforms and channels for spreading the message of anti-Semitism.

It is not only the message, but also the anti-intellectualistic tone of the conversation (especially within social media), making it difficult to show oneself as a critical thinker and encumbering the route to a free debate or dialogue.

The Municipality of Rotterdam<sup>2</sup> is given a key role both as a standard-setting authority, as a facilitating authority for new policies and as the bearer of a culture in which dialogue and free debate are paramount. The latter is currently being overlooked. On the Rotterdam scale, politics will also have a role to play in putting a stop to the anti-Semitism of politicians and the media. Finally, the Jewish community itself must become more open to non-Jewish inhabitants of the city of Rotterdam.

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<sup>1</sup> Five defining characteristics of Jewish identity (1) religion and tradition; (2) the bond with Israel and Zionism; (3) war, persecution and survival; (4) personal history; (5) the interaction between Jewish and Dutch culture (Abram, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> The term "Municipality of Rotterdam" seems to be used as a concept which refers to local administration, politics, and the institutions directly or indirectly related to them, such as public order institutions, culture, education, etc.



## 1.4. Prospect

### 1. **Bonding, anchoring and reflecting**

Anti-Semitism has long been with us and always seems to rear its ugly head in new guises.

*Bonding* is the conversation between Jewish people in which they come into contact with each other, share experiences and take initiatives to bring their situation to the fore. The discussions bring the differences in views and thoughts that exist within the Jewish community to the fore. For example, the paradox of profiling yourself: you want to be seen, but at the same time you don't want to be considered as different. There is a call to investigate discrimination within the Jewish community. One imagines starting a conversation between the generations who have different experiences, discussing the place and meaning of past traumas, the meaning of remembering in relation to the questions that the future poses to young people.

*Bonding* is an active process that contributes to the development of Jewish identity and that the community must be able to safely undertake in its own environment, to meet each other and develop trust in order to engage in external conversation. The participants want continued investment in the opportunity for communities to conduct a dialogue among themselves and between the community and the people in the city.

### 2. **Guarding and protecting**

The participants see the local administration and politicians as the carriers and guardians of this normative framework, by propagating and shaping it in a powerful and positive manner, but also by enforcing it in an unambiguous way when boundaries are transgressed in the city. Rotterdam must take a much more active, proactive and resolute stance when it comes to its Jewish citizens and the experience of anti-Semitism. Particular reference is made in this context to the derailing of the media and politicians.

Rotterdam can also do this by making the reporting of anti-Semitism more accessible to citizens of Rotterdam and making its own employees more sensitive to signals from people who are affected by anti-Semitism.

### 3. **Positive perceptions, knowledge and contact**

The ones to be addressed for problems of discrimination are not the people who are affected by it, but the perpetrators of both direct and indirect and institutional forms of violence.

Research shows that fear and dissatisfaction with one's own social situation, which turn into anger and aggression, give rise to anti-Semitism and discrimination. Engaging in a dialogue with others, transferring knowledge and building bridges, opening up, increasing visibility and a more positive image of the Jewish community/identity are activities that can contribute to an increase in common grounds in Rotterdam. Instruments to achieve this include cultural encounters, such as a Jewish film festival, the activities of the Belvédère storytelling centre, the annual Hanukkah celebrations, but also educational programmes about Jewish history and anti-Semitism (also Wallet, 2019).

The participants see a stimulating and supporting role for the Municipality of Rotterdam, but also for the Jewish community itself, which must step forward and present itself.

### 4. **Acting together**

The participants in the discussion see *bridging* as a form of sharing experiences and knowledge with other groups that experience discrimination. *Bridging* provides a clearer insight into the sources of anger, makes them more understandable and therefore easier to change. This also relates to the conversation with the local administrators to interpret current daily experiences of anti-Semitism (*Linking*). Where old points of view and standards are no longer appropriate, it is necessary to find new words and new points of reference that can once again give a foothold in the face of resurgent anti-Semitism. As an example, the bullying protocols used in schools to



combat anti-Semitic behaviour are considered as inadequate. The municipality is asked to take a critical look at its own functioning. Ultimately, the aim is for both the *Bridging* and *Linking* processes to become more firmly embedded and to stop being incidental.

## 2. THE BLACK COMMUNITY

### 2.1 *Bonding* and the Black identity

The participants are generally satisfied with the meetings of the Bonding phase of the Rotterdam Beyond Discrimination project because of the positive manner of being together, in an open atmosphere, safe, with room for discussion and hope. A 'Black identity' refers to a shared history and origin (ancestry) that people experience (Esajas et al., 2021). The participants see a Black identity that is transnational and does not allow itself to be limited by language barriers, but expresses a shared experience in an own language. In doing so, they make this visible, verifiable, and changeable where it is damaging. The experiences that are shared offer a counterweight to the dominance of the one-sided images that one is confronted with (Clifford, 1988).

### 2.2 Experiences of violence

Esajas et al. (2021) report that anti-Black racism is widespread in society. This picture is confirmed in the Rotterdam discussions. What kind of experiences are there and what does it do to people?

Institutional racism is the heaviest weight. "That has to change," says one of the participants. The proposition is that tackling institutional racism is a social and moral responsibility, while changing individual behaviour is the responsibility of the people concerned. Institutional racism is expressed in explicit exclusion, but also in subtle forms of violence, which run along lines of unwritten rules that are difficult to pin down. This everyday racism refers to the experiences of exclusion (conscious and unconscious) that one experiences in all areas of life (work, safety, education, income, housing, etc.) and becomes meaningful in the context of the accumulated memory of past discrimination and exclusion. Experiences of unequal treatment vary, from large-scale institutional violence, such as the Childcare Benefits Scandal ("*Toeslagenschandaal*"), the state pension gap of elderly people from Suriname and the Rotterdam Act, to unequal treatment and missed development opportunities at work, to poor guidance of Black children in education, negative school recommendations, to discrimination in (mental) healthcare that has not paid enough attention to the pathogenic effects of racism.

This violence weighs heavily on the minds of the victims and is difficult to combat, especially when there is a situation of authority and dependence, as in education. Criticism is dismissed with stereotyping as 'too dominant behaviour': "I'm yet again that angry Black man who is always an activist. I'm really not going to do it anymore." Finally, there are also participants who are victims of direct forms of abuse of power and violence, particularly police violence.

The structural violence that participants identify is massive and is experienced as intangible and unchangeable. It is violence that keeps on reinforcing itself. "It's the way the questions are asked and Black people are used. It's the method they use," said one of the participants. This is what Franklin & Boyd-Franklin (2000) also assert when they say that the many forms of everyday violence serve as 'status reminders', through their implicit message of unworthiness and humiliation to the recipient (2000:36). The challenge is to understand how the interrelationship and actions of institutions towards Black people form Rotterdam shape the fact that people who are seen as deviant and less entitled are also treated as such and thus actually defined as deviant and less entitled (Nicolai 1997, Hall 1992, Morgan 2014). An example is given by a young woman who talks about her work with young people who are disadvantaged in the labour market:



“During a discussion with young people from the target group, in the context of a meet and greet, a policeman asks if anyone wants to work for the police. Nobody raised reacted. The officer then says: 'That's a shame, because we do have a lot of contact with you.' 'This officer must be aware,' tells this participant, 'that it is not natural for these young people to see contact as personal, when someone is wearing a uniform. That is not the case either in situations of ethnic profiling, in which the official doesn't consider you as a subject, but just looks at the outside.'”

## 2.3 Figures

In Rotterdam, anti-Black racism is not registered, in contrast to the situation in Amsterdam. If we extrapolate the Amsterdam figures to Rotterdam, this would mean that 161 reports of anti-Black racism would have been made to RADAR/police in 2020. This is not a good picture, because there is limited willingness to report incidents; according to research, only 3% of the experiences of discrimination are actually reported (Andriessen, 2017).

Participants also doubt the significance of figures based on white definitions, which give a distorted picture. “Nobody trusts these institutions. If you ask people anonymously, you hear very different things”, explains one of them.

## 2.4 What does this do to people?

Being confronted with violent structures leaves scars on the body, the mind and the soul (Galtung, 1990). The discussion participants demonstrate this in their reactions.

### A. Structural precariousness of existence

Deprivation of equal opportunities means that one falls short and cannot develop and ends up in a situation of structural precariousness of existence. This results in what Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois (2017) call the structural violence of poverty, social exclusion, chronic stress, unemployment, illness and systematic devaluation.

### B. Been made invisible

Discussion participants from the Black community feel silenced and belittled in being confronted with derogatory images of Black people on a daily basis. Sometimes they are literally silenced because there are no words for the experiences they face. They always see the same ‘wall of white men’ that belittle their message and stigmatises them as unaccountable and out of control. “We are not silent” said a participant of Cape Verdean origin, “but we have to keep quiet”.

This also leads to a loss of hope and confidence and to the paradoxical situation where people start behaving according to the image that is portrayed of them and are put in a position of dependence (*gaslighting*). The example of the woman who recounts how, after receiving a wrong school recommendation (LHNO), she deliberately started underperforming in order to not be excluded. It leads to constant anticipation, because one is wary of micro-aggressions, and because one wants to avoid evoking them in the other person. These are paradoxical messages that seem to contradict the self-image of Dutch culture that constantly speaks of personal freedom and 'being yourself'.

### C. Overcharged

Some say they were brought up with the ethic of working hard, harder than others. This leads to being overwhelmed and fits in with the observation in this group that Black people ‘have to work twice as hard, for half the money’. In addition, reference is made to the perception of white people that Black children are older than they really are. They are considered more responsible and strong-willed than is psychologically and developmentally appropriate. Black girls are seen as less innocent than their white peers and Black boys are at greater risk of being found guilty of crime and facing police brutality. In psychology, this is called 'adultification' (Goff, Jackson, Di Leone, Culotta, & Ditomasso, 2014, Epstein, Blake & González, 2017).



## D. **Injured**

All this leads to chronic stress and constant vigilance and anticipation that can explain the serious physical, cognitive and psychological disorders that occur (Hosper & Loenen, 2021). Healing is important, being able to process events. A bonding meeting is important for this, as an instrument for empowerment.

## E. **Torn**

Racism tears people apart. This applies to people personally who only see themselves confronted with the practices of large institutions and are told that they are fighting for something that is improper, not worthwhile, and that they themselves are not good. The participants also see disunity in their communities and within families. There is a disconnect between the different generations. There is a lack of understanding on the part of the older generation, sometimes disappointment, and the expectation that the younger generation will deal with it.

What we end up with is damage, being torn apart, resignation, fear and stress, devaluation and a situation of structural instability. Resisting it and counterbalancing the implicit nature of white domination takes a long time. More than in the other communities, this becomes clear in the discourse of the Black community and people seek meaning in bonding, as a *safe space* for themselves.

### **2.5 Where does the violence come from?**

Professor emeritus of anthropology Gloria Wekker points to the dominant self-image of the Netherlands as a small but equitable country, ethically correct, colour blind, free of racism, and a beacon for others. In addition, she points to the colonial past stored in the collective unconscious, which dismisses racist actions and statements as incidents, innocent jokes, or as well-intended. The history of slavery and colonialism is systematically kept out of the collective consciousness, so that social inequality and racism are not seen as systemic. Algerian-French psychiatrist Frantz Fanon (1971), among others, saw and experienced how the perspective of Westerners interferes with the identity of people of colour.

Violence can take many forms, according to Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois (2017). It leads not only to physical harm, but also to the erosion of individuality, the sense of dignity and identity. Bornstein (2004) calls this 'symbolic violence' which attacks and dehumanises the core values and dignity of people. Symbolic aspects of existence are affected such as religion, language, ideology, art, and knowledge. "Dehumanisation places the victim outside the community, outside the circle of moral conduct, and leads to empathy being withheld. By helping ordinary people distance themselves from the pain of those who suffer, symbolic violence enables them to commit or justify heinous acts of armed and structural violence" (Bornstein 2004:111).

### **2.6 Who are the actors that need to be addressed?**

The violence that the participants focus on is systemic violence that is woven into society and becomes visible in the way victims are perceived and treated in the practices of social institutions (agencies, services, professionals). Mentioned are:

- (1) **Education** (poor guidance, an inaccessible internship market and negative images due to poor school recommendations)
- (2) **Employers**, and a less accessible labour market.



- (3) **The administration** both locally and nationally. People want a recognisable and accessible municipality that is vigilant with regard to discrimination and exclusion, and is accessible in its service provision.<sup>3</sup>
- (4) **Government services**, such as the Tax and Customs Administration and the Police (ethnic profiling and abuse of power).
- (5) **Politics**: openly anti-Black racism by politicians. This also applies to the (social) media.
- (6) **Public and private organisations**: housing corporations, estate agents, mortgage lenders and private landlords; healthcare and sports clubs (selective accessibility, discrimination).
- (7) **Legal support** and accessible and affordable (social) lawyers.
- (8) The **Black community** itself.

## 2.7 Suggestions for themes:

During the discussions, themes were mentioned that should be addressed in the follow-up and should lead to concrete agreements and initiatives to bring about change.

1. Black people from Rotterdam want a platform where they can speak out and share and develop their knowledge. A place where they can formulate their own values and norms, which can provide support and counterbalance the dominant attitudes regarding the Black community, the need for a hub for Black entrepreneurs, a support centre when words are lacking to express what they are experiencing.
2. Addressing the fact that personal experiences of discrimination and racism are not neutral. 'Being confronted with it over and over again is emotionally draining.' This means that the history of racism, slavery and colonial violence must be dealt with in a prudent and respectful manner as part of the national inheritance.
3. Diversity in the municipal apparatus. It is important that the diversity of Rotterdam society is represented at all levels of the municipal organisation, not only in the lowest levels.
4. Education and healthcare are often mentioned as areas where change is needed. For example, education that pays more attention to decolonisation and anti-racism, learning to deal with experiences of racism and discrimination, and the unconscious prejudices of teachers. With regard to (mental) healthcare services, the importance of healthcare that is sensitive to the pathogenic aspects of (long-term) experiences with racism and discrimination is pointed out.
5. The ability to report and register anti-Black racism by ameliorating the accessibility of RADAR and the police, and the availability of accessible legal support are necessary for this.
6. Providing training that leads to a change in attitudes among white professionals.

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<sup>3</sup> Accessibility is understood as: available, affordable, approachable, acceptable and connected (Beijers, 2020)



## 3. THE ISLAMIC COMMUNITY

### 3.1 Bonding

The bonding discussion with the Islamic community in Rotterdam had 20 participants in three meetings. Due to the restrictive Covid-19 measures, the second meeting was held online.

Participants generally valued the fact that there was space and opportunity to share individual experiences and find shared norms on an important theme: discrimination and racism. They felt sufficiently safe to do so and expressed a desire to extend and repeat the exchange. One point of criticism concerned the open agenda. There was a need for clarity about the direction and purpose of the exercise.

The dialogues provided a perspective for change and the availability of more resources (information, knowledge, support) (Arneil, 2006). This is on the level of 'tips and tricks' and on the level of creating new knowledge, awareness and depth, which counterbalances negative images (Clifford, 1988). "We learn to talk about what one is going through, that you're not alone and that you can do something in return and that makes me stronger", tells one of the participants. There is real hope and confidence that systemic change is possible.

### 3.2 Experiences of violence / Islamophobia and its manifestations

Islamophobia stands for negative images, symbols, texts, interpretations and attitudes towards 'Islam' and 'the Muslim' (Vijlbrief, Wit, & Fiere, 2021). These lead to social exclusion and unequal treatment of Muslims in the cultural, social, economic and political domain.

Participants see this negative sentiment everywhere in society, in three forms.

#### *Institutional discrimination*

By far the majority of experiences relate to institutional discrimination which is woven into the way of working of institutions. It manifests itself in explicit exclusion, but also in subtle forms of violence - sometimes conscious, sometimes unconscious and along lines of unwritten rules. They are experienced in all areas of life (work, security, education, income, housing, etc.) They are often difficult to pinpoint, and acquire significance because they are part of a long series of similar events, sometimes from the past, which have accumulated over time. It leads to exclusion or to blocking one's chances of a career or access to social services such as care or housing that one needs. One participant says that her husband wrote more than two hundred application letters before he was invited for an interview. Others are rejected because apparently they don't fit into the team, the care model, the image etc. (which is invariably one-sided in its composition). Others point to the negative school recommendations that pupils from Muslim families receive.

It's not easy to influence this. Certainly not when you're up against someone who determines how the situation may or must be defined or assessed. Moreover, one sees that the problem is often glossed over. Police reports of discrimination are not recorded, and reporting Islamophobia is difficult in itself because that 'checkbox' doesn't exist in the register.

Muslims more often see a 'world above' confronting them in which they don't recognise themselves and on which they have insufficient influence. Part of it are the files, filled with negative images, which haunt people for years. This world above views them with suspicion and does not take them and their culture and background seriously. The stigma resides in the system, which rejects or silences people based on prejudiced images of peoples and of their religion and culture.

#### *Hate encounters 1*

There are daily hate encounters, treatment in an aggressive tone because of their Muslim background or their ethnic background, from people with whom one has functional contact. Often directed towards visible symbols, such as a headscarf or not shaking hands, which are seen as disqualifying. The reaction is often



based on implicit prejudice. One of the participants states: "I quit my technical studies because none of the students wanted to work with me because I wear a headscarf", or an internship supervisor concluding after a rejection: "You shouldn't have worn a headscarf, now I can't do anything for you". This experience is not an isolated one. Experiences are shared about people who don't want to cooperate with Muslims or show distrust when someone applies for a job. These are experiences that are linked to wearing a headscarf. The examples are numerous. The act itself stings, and the silence of bystanders is experienced as a 'conspiracy of silence'. A woman from the healthcare sector recounts: "During a meeting, a colleague said that a client had asked him to clean up something. He had responded: "I'm not doing that, my name is not Fatma." She felt attacked by this. "And what really hit me was that nobody said anything." She didn't dare say anything herself, she was the youngest in the team and the only one of colour.

### *Hate encounters 2*

Finally, there are also hate encounters on the part of people with whom one is not in contact, which are also triggered by visible symbols, but then often evoke more conscious and targeted acts of aggression. This can range from direct physical aggression, such as heavy-handed police control of a mother with her 16-year-old son, to forms of negative and taunting behaviour directed against a person, such as the bus driver who refuses to stop, a passer-by who shouts: "You are slaves", or the quasi-interested questions such as "That headscarf must be hot?" or "What kind of a cloth is that?" This also includes ethnic profiling: "If you are a young person 'with a North African appearance' you are constantly taken out of the queue at checkpoints."

The context in which this happens is relevant. In an environment with a lot of diversity, these kinds of remarks are made less often. This applies to the neighbourhoods where one lives, but also the place where one works or learns: "In primary school, when I was 10 and the only 'immigrant', fellow pupils always wanted to beat me up because I was an 'immigrant. I didn't dare tell my father."

Conclusion: There is a massive amount of experience of being denied equal opportunities for and access to necessary amenities and resources (education, work, legal status) in society, as well as hate reactions and direct aggression, directed at the individual, in the form of demanding accountability, rejection, or ethnic profiling.

### **3.3 What does this do to people?**

Being confronted with violent structures leaves scars on the body, the mind and the soul (Galtung, 1990). The participants in these dialogues demonstrate this in their reactions.

#### **a. Structural precariousness of existence**

Deprivation of equal opportunities means that one falls short and cannot develop and ends up in a situation of structural precariousness of existence. This results in what Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois (2017) call the structural violence of poverty, social exclusion, chronic stress, unemployment, illness and systematic devaluation. A woman speaks of her husband who is constantly rejected: "The worst thing I found was that he was not even surprised. You actually see your husband, a proud man, crumble."

#### **b. Becoming demoralised**

Several participants show resignation to what happens to them. They don't want to dwell on it or report what has happened to them because they think they have no influence over it. Others do not dare share their experiences because the environment is unsafe, or because they think they should be 'realistic': "This is not our country, we shouldn't expect too much." The experience of discrimination can also be so woven into daily life that people no longer notice that it happens.



“When you experience so much, you get a feeling that it doesn't matter anyway. When I was younger I got angry, but not anymore. Now I almost feel like a drama queen if I say something about it.” “It's actually weird but often you don't even notice that you are being discriminated against.” “A day doesn't pass without discrimination, but we don't realise it any more. I don't enter into confrontations anymore.”

**c. *Continuous alertness, stress, stagnation and doubt***

Another group of reactions indicates that people store up their negative experiences and start living according to them, by anticipating and being constantly alert. This produces constant stress, doubt and feelings of inferiority and in the long run makes people sick (Selten, 2012). The young woman who was rejected for practical training, reports that she was ‘quiet for a few days’. She doesn't know why this happened: “Your dream has been taken away.” Another said: “Discrimination is always packaged in a way that makes you doubt yourself.”

**d. *Made invisible***

A fourth group of reactions comes from people for whom the experience affects them so deeply that they are silenced. “You have no words for what is happening to you,” someone says. “But it gets into your head.” Victims experience a loss of dignity and don't want to show it. Sometimes, one literally wants to become invisible by not standing out. It is better to shave off your beard, says a mother to her son, even if he feels he is sidelining himself by doing so. This becomes even more painful when the image of the other person is internalised. One of the participants tells how she started behaving according to the negative recommendation from her primary school and deliberately underperformed in order not to be out of place. She started behaving according to the negative label she had received. This is the phenomenon that Bourdieu (2017) called symbolic violence.

The negative effects of these experiences are the structural violence of poverty, social exclusion, chronic stress, unemployment, illness and systematic devaluation. Those affected feel silenced, because of the intangibility of the experience, out of shame, or because images are internalised. Cultural violence is a constant, something that is perpetual and permanent, argues Galtung (1990), and resisting it requires great patience and counterweight in the form of positive images and knowledge that can counterbalance the implicit nature of domination (Bourdieu, 2017; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2017; Clifford, 1988). The participants also want to show this counterbalance, which is a fifth reaction to the violence:

**e. *Going one's own way***

Some of the participants also turn away from the violence and don't want to be touched by it anymore. They concentrate on their own future prospects, based on their own standards and values. This can be done, for example, by becoming their own boss, in an environment that offers enough support and security, but also by resorting to a stronger experience of faith: “It was precisely because of the confrontation with Islamophobia that I began to immerse myself more in faith and chose to wear a headscarf.” They find comfort and support in this. Some seek strength by working on empowerment, for example by teaching young people to stand up for themselves better and to talk about their experiences. “You can influence your own behaviour”, explains one of the participants. Seeking dialogue and transferring knowledge, for example in education, is also seen as a tool for bringing about change.



### 3.4 The sources of anger

Violence can take many forms, according to Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois (2017). It leads not only to physical harm, but also to the erosion of individuality, the sense of dignity and identity. Bornstein (2004) calls this 'symbolic violence' which attacks and dehumanises the core values and dignity of people. "Dehumanisation places the victim outside the community, outside the circle of moral conduct, and leads to empathy to be withheld. By helping ordinary people distance themselves from the pain of those who suffer, symbolic violence enables them to commit or justify heinous acts of armed and structural violence" (Bornstein 2004:111).

Where does this come from? The Palestinian-American scholar Edward Said points to the negative attitude of the 19th century European colonial powers towards 'the Eastern world' (Said, 1978). The Western cultural world, for example, traditionally portrayed the Arab world as a society to be ordered and educated, something to be judged, illogical, childish, sometimes fanatical and irrational. This representation served, on the one hand, the purpose of establishing an exalted self-image, an outlet for Western identity, and, on the other, the legitimisation of colonial rule (Çankaya, 2022). This has embedded itself in the (unconscious) Western thinking (cultural archive) described by Said as 'Orientalism' (also Wekker, 2016). That mindset relates to people and their lifestyles and beliefs, and in recent decades has increasingly focused on Islam as defining Eastern identity (Valk, 2012). Islamophobia no longer focuses only on the Eastern world, but also on the Muslim communities of the West and a Western definition of Islam as essentially a threat to a self-image of Enlightenment (Bornedal, ny; Kerboua, 2016). Also Sunier (2009) frames the marginalisation of post-war immigrants in North-Western Europe and globalisation in an image of confrontation of the secular with the religious, of conflicting civilisations and the need to govern and control this population and its attributed religious beliefs.

This negative attitude seems to be confirmed in the images with which the participants in this study are confronted and also in the studies of Vijlbrief et al. (2021) and Yuksel & Butter (2020).

### 3.5 Who should be addressed on this?

The participants dwell on their own responsibility and role, but emphasise that the problem should not be left to the Islamic community alone. 'The system' also has to change. By 'the system', they mean the prevailing images that exist and the prevailing norms that are expressed in the practices of all kinds of institutions and bodies, which you follow to fit in, but which actually put you at a disadvantage. They are expressions of the images and projections about Islam and about Muslims in the Netherlands that live in Dutch society, 'the world of ideas', as Çankaya (2022) describes it. They are the beliefs that live in society, that are reproduced daily in the way people of the Islamic faith are treated. They determine what is legitimised in terms of behaviour and changing the existing order, and what is not. This is exemplified by equal treatment ("I am colourblind"), which actually produces inequality. These images confirm one's own dominance and elevation over the Other (Kerboua, 2016; Valk, 2012).

Which institutions are involved (in random order)?

- **Education** (inequality is reproduced by poor guidance, an inaccessible internship market and by wrong school recommendations).
- Misunderstanding and negative images in the treatment at the **child healthcare centre** (extra assessment of family values), as well as **doctors, nurses and social workers and professionals in hospitals**.
- **(social) media** that uncritically pass on anti-Islamic images of ultra-right-wing politicians, but also the 'framing' of the Islamic community, which feeds Islamophobia.



- **Police and RET officials (public transport) and the businesspeople community** who are insufficiently vigilant for discrimination or Islamophobic violence.
- **Municipal and national politicians**, who should act as guardians of society and condemn discrimination and Islamophobia (also within their own ranks) and prosecute when the law is broken. Flashpoints are discrimination
  - o on the labour market and in internships
  - o in the nightlife scene
  - o in sports organisations and on sports fields
- **Radar** helps to make a legal impact and to provide personal support, but it should better translate the intangible of the experience of violence into an imputable form of discrimination. The **police** should be more accessible for filing reports of discrimination
- Finally, the **Muslim (organisations)** themselves are also a player in solving the problems: This, however, requires less division and a self-critical attitude, including on ones own discriminatory behaviour.

### 3.6 Suggestions for themes

In the conversations, themes were mentioned that should be addressed in the future on behalf of the Islamic community. It is striking that, despite the fact that there are many negative experiences, the attitude is generous and constructive when it comes to the suggestions for follow-up.

#### a. **Promoting equal opportunities: accessibility of resources (internships, labour market, care, antidiscrimination-hotline)**

The participants find that several issues need to be addressed:

- Improving factual accessibility, for example by creating trainee posts. By getting more insight into the barriers Muslims experience in their careers and in healthcare, community teams, education etc. By stimulating inclusive policies (among employers) and letting the Municipality of Rotterdam take the lead as a role model. By organising an ombuds function to which people can turn for advice and support (specifically for Muslims) and which can speak with authority.
- By promoting knowledge about the negative consequences of the exclusion of young people (motivation, health and behaviour); and by making them more resilient.

#### b. **Transferring knowledge and changing images**

More knowledge and different images of Islam can create a counter image to the prevailing Western view of Islam. Reporting positive news contributes to this, countering disinformation about Islam and the Islamic community on (social) media, increasing knowledge about Islam in educational programmes, equal appreciation of Islam comparable to the other (religious) pillars (holidays, special education), stimulating mutual contacts and meeting each other (bridging, mainstreaming).

#### c. **Strengthening one's identity**

Bonding helps to build one's own identity, valued by others, in which one feels strong and proud. Within the Muslim community, one sees that young people do not follow their parents anymore and older people do not understand what is happening in the world of young people. They lack role models and increasingly emulate the role models and the volatile world of social media. New role models are needed to whom young people can relate, with a view to the future. Bonding meetings help here and should be organised more often and on a larger scale.



d. **Institutional support**

It would be good if the municipality would constantly engage in dialogues with the Islamic community and thus show itself to be constantly vigilant. In this way, the municipality creates institutional support to be able to continue to fight forms of Islamophobia and to promote a greater feeling of safety within the community. Reporting is also important in this context, in order to gain more insight into the experiences of discrimination and Islamophobia with which the Muslim community has to contend. For this, it is necessary to increase the accessibility of the reporting centres and the willingness to report: "Discrimination is really not normal. Not even if you come from a culture in which politeness is central." One of the suggestions made is to increase the number of hotlines and make them more accessible. Lessons at school can also contribute to this, learning to report and to address others about their behaviour in a way that actually leads to change.

e. **Transgenerational traumatising**

Traumatising transmitted across generations within families and communities is mentioned as an aspect that affects labour migrants, but also refugee families. Trauma of abandonment/displacement, of violence experienced before and during migration or flight, and of the lack of recognition for this after arrival in the Netherlands, are burdens that families carry with them.

f. **An inclusive society**

The white western norm must be questioned. This concerns the representativeness of the top echelons of society in which Muslims feel under-represented, making it difficult to question the power to define problems and solutions in which they don't feel represented. Young people want to have a voice and be represented in the world of government and politics and they want to see role models who matter. Bonding specifically aimed at young people would also help here.



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