More than Merit:

An (auto)ethnographic account of

being an International student during a

pandemic

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Acknowledgment

Abstract:

This thesis demonstrates how forces of internationalization and the 'global war for talent' have led to the creation of harmful exclusionary environments for International students in Utrecht University(UU), the effects of which have been exposed and exacerbated during the Coronavirus pandemic. The UU's push towards internationalization and its policies have been akin to those of other Western universities, but the gap between its discourse and practice is highlighted by apathetic and opaque institutional processes that hinder dialogue and open communication. These questions are explored through interviews and autoethnographic material. Institutional routes of complaint procedures and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion initiatives are explored as potential ways to raise and explore important questions regarding the inclusion of International students within the UU.

Contents

Introduction:

On the 6th of August, 2020, I received an email from my study advisor, NFM Kramer, informing me that my residence permit to the Netherlands would have to be canceled because I had not yet made the 30 ECs required as mandatory 'study progress'. As an International student from India, this came as a rude shock to me. Not only did I have to move back home to India now, but I also had to do so having failed to acquire the credits necessary to stay on. As result I saw myself as failing and underperforming to the extent that I no longer should be given the right of residence in the Netherlands. What followed was a time of uncertainty, in which all my efforts to understand the visa processes of the University were mostly in vain. But during the process of trying to find answers for my then predicament, I could see that the bureaucratic processes within Utrecht University (henceforth, UU) were circuitous, unhelpful, and unclear. My visa issues were not the only problems I had faced as a non-EU International student of colour, and it made me wonder if the problem was my ostensible lack of "progress" or if there was something not quite right with the process too. Was I alone in this? This thesis is motivated by these academic and personal questions. The path that this research took me on, taught me that I was not alone in facing these challenges and asking these questions.

I had heard many students talk of their thesis as a 'labour of love'. Mine, however, is borne out of anger. I would have, perhaps, used 'disappointment' or some other more unctuous, less controversial term, but as I have been taught in my Gender studies Masters, feminist rage must be reclaimed (Ahmed, 2013). As an International Student in the Netherlands since 2017, I have noted that the disparities between non- EU/EEA students and Dutch/EU/EEA are striking and go beyond (though definitely are punctuated by) tuition fees.[1] This disparity and my own experiences at UU explain my affinity to the subject. For this study, I will refer to non-Dutch students as 'International' and I will make the necessary distinctions between students who are from within and from outside the EU, when required. As the global pandemic rages, its effects seem to be more indicative of discrepancies that already exist. As a mechanism that has exposed and has brought attention to already existing problems, the crisis is only intensifying 'the fault lines' within the neoliberal university (Sharma, 2020).

This thesis seeks to explore three central and interconnected questions:

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[1] Tuition fee costs vary. The statutory fee is the lower or subsidized tuition fee that Dutch/EU/EEA students pay, and the institutional fee is the higher tuition fee paid by non-EU/EEA students.

a) How the institutional processes within the University structure are particularly exclusionary towards International students; b) how the Coronavirus pandemic has simultaneously exposed and exacerbated this exclusion; and c) what are the existing mechanisms in the University that can potentially become routes for the inclusion of International students.

Method:

In terms of empirical research, this thesis draws upon and expands the research undertaken as part of my internship project with the Read-in Collective[2] (Goswami, 2021). The two primary methods used were interviews with students and autoethnography.

The respondents are from study programs of the Humanities Faculty at UU, unless indicated otherwise, as they were who I had access to, being affiliated to one myself. I also interviewed an international student who is an art student at KABK, Den Haag. His social media account was one of the few instances I could find of student activism in the Netherlands centered around International (non-EU-EEA) students.

Most of the student respondents had expressed a preference for anonymity to allow for more freedom to express thoughts, negative and positive experiences they have had at an institution they are still a part of (Ahmed, 2012, p. 10). The following are the anonymized respondents with the details they were comfortable with sharing:

- Respondent R is from India (non-EU/EEA) and is in the second year of her Masters
- Respondent L is from China (non-EU/EEA) and is in the second year of her Masters
- Respondent C is from India (non-EU/EEA) and is in the first year of her Masters
- Respondent N is from Moldova (Romanian, EU) and is in the second year of her masters
- Respondent U is from the United States (EU passport) and has recently graduated
- Respondent I is a refugee student who recently got Dutch citizenship and is a continuing student at UU
- Respondent RC was a student at UU and was a student member of the University Council[3] some years ago. He is from the Netherlands.

[2] My internship, from the 28th of October 2020 to the 11th of January 2021, was with the Read-in collective which is a Stichting that explores the various dimensions of collective reading- of 'reading together' as political action. It is a self-organized collective and was initiated in February 2010 in Utrecht, NL by artist Annette Krauss and theater maker Hilde Tuinstra. My internship included two online events that I did close captioning for and I undertook a research project on the UU's response to the Corona crisis vis-à-vis International students (Goswami, 2021).

[3] Students are represented at Utrecht University through the University council which has 12 student representatives who are elected by the students each year, along with 12 members of staff.' The University Council promotes the interests of all employees and students with the Executive Board of

- Respondent M is a student at University College Utrecht (UCU)
- Respondent K is an art student from Iran and is enrolled at Royal Academy of Art (KABK), The Hague

In terms of keeping most of the respondents anonymous, I decided to use only letters instead of pseudonyms. This decision (albeit the drier alternative) was taken because the respondents come from a multiplicity of nationalities, and I found it very difficult to find a suitable pseudonym that would be respectful of the culture and nationality of each respondent.

The respondents not anonymized are Menno Kramer who is the Senior Advisor of International Marketing & Recruitment at Utrecht University and Andreia Duque, an international student from Portugal who is one of the two first and only non-Dutch student members of the UU University Council. They were elected in 2019 and their tenure coincided with the pandemic crisis. Both respondents did not wish to be anonymized and were happy to speak on record.

Additionally, my autoethnographic notes comprise of conversations and email exchanges with my assigned Study Advisor[4], NFM Kramer and two student deans - Dr. MA Merton and Drs. Frank Peters. They were primarily the figures representing UU administration in my experience as a student (and in this thesis).

An initial dilemma I encountered was what was meant by 'the University'. For this project what I mean are the processes within Utrecht University (UU) in particular, but I support these arguments with material on the entity of the University, particularly the Western university. I perused newspaper reports on International students, scoured the various pages of the UU website and analysed bulk emails that were sent by the administration to International Students. Another dilemma I faced was the definition of an international student. My initial plan was specifically to focus on non-EU/Dutch students, but as conversations about this during the initial interviews I conducted, grew, I was put in touch with some students who were from the EU. I therefore decided to focus on non-Dutch students and make distinctions as and when needed.[5]

Utrecht University. As a regular discussion partner for the Board, the council contributes greatly to the course of the university as a whole, as well as the state of affairs within the university.' (Utrecht University, 2021).

[4] Each program is assigned a team of Study Advisors who are the point of contact for students seeking advice on practical matters of their study, for example, delays, finances, change of program, etc. The team of Study Advisors is also sometimes responsible for ascertaining who is eligible for financial help.

[5] Respondent RC is the only Dutch student I interviewed. His insights on the workings of the University Council were of value for this research.

I conducted a total of eleven interviews via Zoom. They were semi-structured and ranged from specific questions on university communication during the pandemic, to more general ones about what the students' general experiences were with the University/institution. In conducting these interviews at least, the pandemic worked in my favour. It has necessitated more flexible ways of working and I could speak with people while I could not physically be in the Netherlands and my research could continue.

The most difficult method perhaps has been the use of my own experiences that I have tried to weave with the voices of my interviewees. In that sense, to be able to buttress my own experiences with those of others has been validating, though the process was sometimes quite terrifying. I say terrifying not because of any repercussions I might face, but more for the claims and analyses to be reduced in legitimacy as a 'personal issue' and not a systemic one. On the other hand, I was also aware of the disturbing possibility of this thesis sounding like a (very) long letter of grievance. My intention in using autoethnography has to do with my experience as an International student, to offer, as Laslett suggested, "a new vantage point" through the intersection of the personal and the societal, from which "a unique contribution to social science" could be made (Laslett, 1999).

Methodology:

Despite the Corona crisis, there has been a steady increase in the number of International students to the Netherlands (ICEF Monitor, 2019). The 'facts and figures page' of the Utrecht University website states that 1,537 international (non-EU/EEA) students from 118 different countries, are currently enrolled (Utrecht University, 2020g)[6]. This increase, however, has not been followed by as much academic interest. Scholarship on international students was scarce in the Dutch context, but there was more material available on students in countries like the USA, Canada, the UK and Australia. This existing body of work was of immense help to me in providing a framework of reference towards internationalization of education in developed countries. The exploration of the notion of 'merit' and 'talent' and how these have affected various regulations in universities is another important body of work that has helped me in my analyses. This thesis is also an exploration of opaque institutional processes within the University and how it affects its vulnerable (international) students. For this, I heavily draw on the work of Sara Ahmed, whose work on racism and impenetrable 'brick walls' within

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[6] From the information on the Nuffic website (Nuffic, n.d.) and the Internationalization Task force (Utrecht University, 2018) report one can glean that UU is on the lower end in terms of the proportion of International students vis-à-vis other major Dutch universities - with Maastricht University having the highest population of International students.

the University structure was of great help in the formulation of my arguments. Researcher Mariana Escobar Gomez's views on re-thinking decolonial pedagogies and centering the experiences and problems faced by International students were also valuable for this thesis. Gomez opines that decolonial narratives need to "develop adequate language" to address the structural inequality "reproduced by different educational practices" and by institutions of higher education in the attempt to provide "global access to education by allowing students with various geographical origins to enroll—specifically, allowing non-EU students to enroll in EU universities" (Escobar Gómez, 2019, p. 116). For this, it is essential that there is "institutional commitment...to foster the wellbeing of international students. Hence, narratives of coloniality and decoloniality need to be (re)theorized by listening to the multiple voices and diverse experiences of international students" (Escobar Gómez, 2019, p. 123). With the current emphasis on decolonizing the university and the push towards more diversity in recruitment of students and staff, it is imperative to look at International Students (especially those from the Global South) and their issues, which, I contend in this thesis, are not given adequate importance. For this, I examined UU's policies by analyzing emails to students and the information available on the UU website regarding its International students. This analysis led to how these policies broadly relate to the question of International Students in the Netherlands in general, and how processes of the University, even those seeking to be inclusive, end up further alienating this portion of the student population.

Relevance

I was given a glimpse of how timely this project was when I came across several new articles published on news platforms like Dutchnews.nl and the UU student magazine DUB, that spoke of this very topic — published after I was done with my internship report (Nicholls-Lee, 2021). Though I would ideally have liked to leave any thoughts on this thesis to the potential reader, the respondents I interviewed expressed that this conversation my thesis initiates is an important one, with Respondent R saying that she would hope that this research "could be the start of something".

There is a strand of discomfort I felt while writing this thesis that I feel compelled to share. I was/am, in some ways, considered an 'underperforming'[7] International student. Would this fact lead to my views being discredited? I was already, in my eyes at least, a 'problem student' – an epithet reserved for "a constellation of related figures: the consuming student, the censoring student, the over-sensitive student, and the complaining student" (Ahmed, 2018). Would I then suffer the added ignominy of being a 'complaining' student as well? But the curious thing about 'problem students' of

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[7] By the standards enshrined in the UU's 'Satisfactory Academic Progress' requirements (See Appendix IV)

most stripes is that they often end up exposing the problems within a current system - in a manner similar to the way the pandemic has exposed its flaws as well. It was perhaps in the interviews and later the student experiences published on different online platforms, that gave me the confidence that the project that I was undertaking was not an exercise in solipsistic navel gazing. They helped me find the vocabulary to make sense of and express my own experiences. As Ahmed, in an interview with Sana Ali says, "connecting with others who are just as angry as you is transformative in and of itself, in order to finally say 'it's not just about me, it's about a system and a structure'" that do not "enable me to be in a comfortable way, there's a point and purpose to challenging them." (Ali, 2018).

The rigidity of institutional structures has proven unsustainable in the time of a crisis. For example, a UU webpage on the crisis itself suggests that to create and sustain a resilient society, it has to "Adapt!" (Utrecht University, 2021b). Working and adapting towards a better tomorrow starts with spaces like UU engendering dialogue. Icaza and Vasquez say in their essay on decolonizing the university,' "Universities as spaces imbued with norms and rituals or as institutional contexts that involve structures and emotions in which some people feel at home and others are alienated, are implicated in the epistemic violence in the modern/colonial division of the geopolitics of knowledge."(Icaza Garza & Vázquez, 2018, p. 118). These 'norms and rituals' are cemented through exclusionary institutional policies and practices, and the pandemic can be seen as the lens that magnifies their presence (Goswami, 2021). To create a space in the University where no one would feel alienated would require dialogue followed by institutional change. This forms the basis of 'decolonization in praxis' which can only 'start where we stand' (Hunt & Holmes, 2015) as change often begins at home.

Starting where one stands would need an exploration of the ground one is standing on. For this purpose, the first chapter will outline UU's response to the Coronavirus pandemic vis-à-vis international students. This chapter will also briefly provide a background of internationalization as a policy in Western higher education institutions and place the Netherlands and UU within that context as this background is significant in the formulation of UU's policies. Chapter 2 deals with the issue of student visas: how internalization has informed its policies and how the coronavirus pandemic has necessitated a conversation about these policies and their effect on students. The third chapter outlines the ways in which certain institutional practices can represent 'start(ing) where one stands': how complaint structures and diversity and inclusion policies have the potential to start and carry this conversation forward.

In this chapter I will delineate and analyze the response of the Utrecht University to the Coronavirus pandemic vis-à-vis its international students. To help support this analysis, I looked for material on the pandemic and its effect on international students in Western universities. However, the scholarship available on the topic was scant. Most of the literature available on the Corona pandemic and its impact on students/higher education has been about the trials of transitioning to e-learning, the isolation of lockdowns and the disruption of regular student life (Matthewman & Huppatz, 2020; Martel, 2020; Nicola, et al., 2020; Sharma, 2020). Less empirical research exists on what universities have been doing to help students through this crisis. The topic of internationalization and its promotion in Western universities and its influence on the growing number of international students is important to consider when providing some context to the formulation of my analysis of UU's pandemic response, which is why I will start there.

1.1: Internationalization and the creation of a meritocracy: a brief introduction

Any discussion on international students behooves a brief overview of the push towards internationalization in Western universities. As Brooks and Waters (2011) state:

> Over the last two decades, the meaning of 'internationalization' for higher education has undergone a fundamental and decisive shift. From being a topic of vague, peripheral interest to colleges and universities, it now represents an issue that is highly prioritized in strategic plans and policy agendas. (p. 160)

This prioritizing of internationalization has led to a significant increase in the number of foreign students choosing to study in universities in the Global North. The numbers doubled between 1980 and 2000 to almost 1.8 million and are projected to quadruple to 7 million by 2025 (Vincent-Lancrin, 2004). The rationale behind the prioritization of internationalization of higher education has mostly been centered on the rhetoric of attracting 'the best and brightest', by and to (mostly) universities in the Global North, the nuances of which have been discussed by various scholars, especially in the field of higher education (Brown & Tannock, 2009; Escobar Gómez, 2019; Madge, Raghuram, & Noxolo, 2009; Ploner & Nada, 2019). As this development creates a complex global network of skilled labor, Brown and Tannock (2009) ask the question:

What does meritocratic competition mean when extended beyond national boundaries? What implications does the global war for talent have for our understanding of education, economy and social justice? (p.377-78)

This push towards an ostensible "global meritocracy" is, however, a meritocratic utopia based on neoliberal ideas that have been directly derived from neoliberal corporate human resources literature and is inextricable from economic gain (Brown & Tannock, 2009; Sandel, 2020).

In the Netherlands, this push is reflected in the two major initiatives put forward by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science called – the "Study in Holland" initiative and the Netherlands Universities Foundation for International Cooperation (Nuffic, n.d.). Nuffic also has nine overseas Netherlands Education Support Offices (NESOs) representing the "Dutch knowledge sector abroad" (Nuffic, n.d.). These offices are scattered around countries in the Global South[8]. The rationale behind this being that Netherlands "is committed to becoming a stronger competitive knowledge-based economy" and for that needs to be more accessible to "*talented* students across the world [emphasis added]" (Top Universities, 2021). This emphasis on "talent" echoes what Brown and Tannock have dubbed "the global war for talent", which is the crux of internationalization.

The UU's push towards internationalization is evidenced by the formation of the Internationalization Task Force.[9] The language in its report abounds in references to attracting more talent – an example being its recommendation to "promote incoming and outgoing student mobility, keeping an eye on *quality* [emphasis added]" (Utrecht University, 2018). Therefore, the steady increase in the number of international students to the Netherlands (and to the UU) from both within and outside the EU can be attributed to a concerted effort made by universities to attract more foreign "talent".

Where the Netherlands ostensibly departs from this trend is in revenue. It is well documented how universities in the UK and Australia gain financially by recruiting more international students who pay higher fees (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Madge, Raghuram, & Noxolo, 2009; Ploner & Nada, 2019). I asked Respondent Menno Kramer if universities in the Netherlands operate in the same way and he said, "that's not how it works here, Dutch universities do not profit off International students." Freddy Weima, Director of NUFFIC (who recently stepped down), was interviewed by DUB and asked if internationalization would mean "everyone who is able to pay for the tuition fees is welcome to study

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[8] There are NESO offices in 9 countries- Brazil, Indonesia, China, India, Korea, Vietnam, South Africa, Russia and Mexico

[9] In this thesis I will refer to the Internationalization Task Force further as ITF. Its report was finalized on the 16th of September 2018.

here" (DUB, 2021). His response was: "No. That is what they do in Australia (...) they recruit international students with a profit margin. Personally, I think it's a *better strategy to focus on attracting talent.* That's something completely different from trying to bring as many students as possible to our country [emphasis added]" (DUB, 2021). This is echoed in the ITF report which says, "[a]ttracting more international students simply to increase 'revenue' is not a goal of internationalization. However, their careful recruitment and selection is, with the aim being not to maximize numbers but to ensure that we attract and educate *talented and motivated* students [emphasis added]" (Utrecht University, 2018, p. 2). The constant reiteration of the rhetoric of "talent" and therefore "merit" being the primary object as opposed to monetary gain also seems to bear with it an element of moral superiority. The suggestion is that the quest for "talent" is beyond monetary gain and is inextricably linked to lofty institutional ideals of "changing the world" (Utrecht University, 2018). Although Weima emphasizes on the focus on talent being of strategic importance, he did not go into detail (in this particular interview) about *why* this would be a better strategy. What is significant here is the fact that for such an essential component, "merit/talent" seems to have been left undefined and vague (Brown and Tannock, 2009). This lack of definition leaves a lot of room for it to be appropriated and used as a justification for deepening existing inequalities (Sandel, 2020). Another recommendation in the ITF report states, "[w]e recommend analyzing their performance (pass rates, grades, English-language proficiency, lecturer and supervisor experiences) to gain a better understanding of the quality of those who do come to Utrecht" (Utrecht University, 2018, p. 6). An international student therefore must be constantly analyzed and must be able to continue to prove themselves meritorious and therefore deserving, both for their recruitment and for their years at UU. It is evident, therefore, that foreign students have to justify their presence in the UU by proving their "talent".

The ITF submitted their report in 2018, two years before the Coronavirus pandemic. The question now, to reconceptualize Brown and Tannock's question, what do these meritocratic ideals *do* in the time of a global crisis? This brief background of internationalization is significant as it puts the basis of the university's relationship with and attitude towards its international students into focus, which is an important element and a useful framework in the following analysis of the university's pandemic response vis-à-vis its international students.

1.2: UU pandemic response

On the UU website[10], the page titled "Tips for life in Corona times" states: "The coronavirus *messes up a lot of lives*, even when you're not sick. Studying at home, not seeing any friends, maybe being far away from your family... that can confront you with all sorts of uncertainties, for instance financially, or perhaps mentally [emphasis added]" (Utrecht University, 2021c). The pandemic has had significant impact on student well-being, specifically in financial and mental health matters (Bronkhorst, 2020a, 2020b). As Respondent Menno Kramer said, "[i]t's been a struggle, student morale is at an all-time low." What are the ways in which UU has responded to this crisis? In the following sections I will discuss and analyze the same.

1.2.1 Financial Aid

I will first discuss the financial aspect of aid provided as it was the topic most discussed during the interviews I conducted.

Juxtaposing the corona waiver and the pre-pandemic graduation support scheme:
I received an email on the 12th of June 2020 regarding the introduction of a Corona fee waiver by UU- sections of which are summarized below. This information is now also available on the UU website (Utrecht University, 2020d).[11]

For all students, regardless of nationality, the Dutch government would offer financial compensation of €535 for Master's students who have experienced a delay in study progress and the rules for graduating cum laude would be relaxed. For non-EEA students who are unable to graduate in academic year 2019-2020 as a result of the coronavirus crisis 'will not have to pay the institutional tuition fee rate in 2020-2021, but the statutory rate only for the period (in months) required to complete the missing curriculum components' (Utrecht University, 2020d). It was later added that one would have to apply for the waiver (non-EU/EEA students) and then it would be adjudged, by a group of Student Counsellors, on a case-to-case basis. It would only be provided for students who, "*must have originally* been able to graduate by 31 August 2020 at the latest [and] *must have been delayed* in 2019-2020 due to: *Special personal circumstances as a direct result* of COVID-19 (e.g.*, falling ill with COVID-19, family circumstances, informal care, or other circumstances beyond your control*) [or]

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[10] https://students.uu.nl/en/corona/tips-for-life-in-corona-times
[11] https://students.uu.nl/en/news/corona-arrangements-for-students

[c]ancellation of part of your curriculum (for example, a cancelled or delayed internship/thesis) due to COVID-19 [emphasis added]" (Utrecht University, 2020d).

For a short background and comparison to pre-pandemic times, it is important to mention that the UU provides financial help through what is referred to as Graduation Support (Utrecht University, 2020b) since before the pandemic. It is defined as "financial support to (Non-EU/EEA) students who fall behind schedule in their studies, *due to circumstances beyond their control* [emphasis added]" (Utrecht University, 2020b). Full-time students of UU are eligible to apply and "unforeseen circumstances" could include illness, pregnancy, exceptional family circumstances, etc. However, continuing students are not eligible for support. For example, if a student is in their third year of a 2-year Masters degree, they are not eligible for the aid. In other words, students who were continuing their course beyond the time stipulated by the specific programme were not eligible.

I noticed that ambiguous terminology abounds in both these descriptions of financial aid opportunities extended by the university. For 'Graduation support' one would have to prove that the circumstances were 'beyond one's control' but there is little explanation of what that might include or exclude (Goswami, 2021). It is also explicitly mentioned that frequency of communication with one's Study Advisor will be taken into account, though it is also indicated that "it is still worth" applying to even if there has been no contact with the Study Advisor (Utrecht University, 2020b). Again, there is noticeable ambiguity in the language used; for example, how far does one's communication with their Study Advisor influence the final decision? There is here, also, a whiff of the meritocratic ideal: it must be *beyond* one's control for the justification of any financial aid received.

The Corona waiver offered to non-EU/EEA students also follows the same pattern of linguistic and therefore practical ambiguity. How can one safely ascertain that a student would or would not have graduated by a stipulated period had Corona not affected them? Studies have suggested that the pandemic has had significant impact on the mental and physical health of students regardless of whether they had contracted the virus or not (Aristovnik, Keržič, Ravšelj, Tomaževič, & Umek, 2020). Also, since this waiver was meant specifically for non-EU/EEA students, it is peculiar that a Corona diagnosis for a family member features here when most students' families likely live on other continents, to which they also, in all probability, could not travel (for some time at least) because of air-travel bans. Here too we see the emergence of "other circumstances beyond your control" – the meaning of which is not any clearer in this case (Utrecht University, 2020b). On another front, since the lock down(s) have had significant impact on every student's lifestyle and well-being, it is not particularly fair to issue such criteria when this assistance was meant only for a block.

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Corona crowdfunding

Another opportunity for financial aid has been a crowdfunding campaign for students who are in "acute financial distress due to the corona crisis" but are not eligible for any existing schemes (Utrecht University, 2020e), which was started by The Utrecht University Fund. The web page on this crowdfunding initiative, specifies that one can put in a "request for support" to provide for their "livelihood or to meet acute medical costs that are not covered by the health insurance" (Utrecht University, 2020e). The applications are assessed by student counsellors and the decisions are based on answers questions of which kind of shortage was caused by which corona measure and what one needs the support for and what the amount would be (Utrecht University, 2020e).

Respondent Testimonies

Respondent L's experience highlights further the flawed logic of the criteria for the waiver. She applied for the Corona waiver and was rejected because she "could not prove" that she would have graduated by August 2020. She stated: "I was very depressed since my first year and could not work enough to prove that I would've graduated on time." She also could not go home because of financial and other constraints brought on by the virus: "I feel very isolated and like I haven't really been outside for a year. My mental health has suffered terribly." Respondent L is from China and Covid has had a severe impact on her family's income. This has caused her great financial duress as well. "The tuition fee is very high, and the living expenses keep mounting and I got absolutely no help from the university. How am I supposed to prove that Corona has affected me?" She added that her meetings with her Study Advisor helped but had no tangible outcome in terms of institutional help or financial support. The onus of deciding what constitutes a circumstance beyond one's control lies solely in the hands of a group of counsellors with little to no knowledge of the student's lived experience. As Respondent I said, "They have their own rules. They accept and reject you according to those and no one seems to know for sure what those are exactly." These "rules" and criteria form the basis of financial aid requirements and there seems to be no way to contest its contents. The UU site's Complaints section clearly states that no complaints can be registered about policies established in the university (Utrecht University, 2020c). Therefore, the institutional pathway of complaints is inaccessible to a student who wants to express their dissatisfaction of certain University policies.

Respondent U spoke of her challenges at the time of her interview, "I had applied for graduation support five months ago. I haven't heard anything from them". She mentioned a friend of hers (a UU student from the UK) who could not get any support from this even though she had furnished medical evidence of having suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder and severe depression for a whole year. None of the student respondents I had interviewed had received or had heard of anyone

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receiving the fee waiver or graduation support extended by the university. I did not have access to actual numbers as these are not released by the university and therefore cannot draw any concrete conclusions regarding this. Furthermore, as Respondent U remarks, one could pose questions about the role of study advisors in assessing a student's mental health. "Shouldn't they ask my therapist to do that?", she asked.

With the caveats laid out by UU for a student deserving of financial help during a pandemic, a certain idea of merit informs the aid extended. To be *deserving* of financial help, one must have proved one's merit by proving that they would have graduated on time if not for the pandemic (as ambiguous as it may be). Therefore, continuing students need not apply as they had the opportunity to prove their merit and had not been able to do so in the time before the pandemic struck. The "global war for talent" has not been accompanied by any global "political or moral (social justice) frameworks": there is no structure available to address these inequities (Brown and Tannock, 2009). In other words, though Western universities have had a notably greater number of international students owing to internationalization efforts, this has not been followed by an effort to create systems where these foreign students can be protected. Most 'developed' nations would have policies in place for the protection of students from their own countries, but no structure of assistance in place for international students (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Brown & Tannock, 2009; Madge, Raghuram, & Noxolo, 2009).

In terms of help from UU's crowdfunding campaign, Respondent N had applied to this fund after she lost her job and was struggling to pay her rent. They gave her 500 euros for her rent for the month. "I am thankful because it is at least something." A friend of hers had suggested that she check if there is a corona fund at the university. "I feel like I cannot really complain since I did receive help. But then again, it's not even half my fee. I am also appalled that so little financial help is available. I should not be feeling lucky to be getting this," she added. She mentioned that she felt "strange" having to constantly explain (in detail) why she needed financial aid. She said she felt like she had to "beg for it". The process is designed in a way that the student must go into details of how the crisis has affected them without much thought as to how it might be extremely triggering for many to recount the problems they have faced. Respondents N and L both talked about the discomfort they felt in having to describe their ordeal.

A crowdfunding campaign could be a good ancillary initiative, as it allows students who do not qualify for other financial assistance another opportunity for help. However, crowdfunding should not be seen as a replacement for institutional aid. It is dependent on how much money people can and are

willing to donate and outsourcing something as central as financial aid might also be indicative of the university not taking adequate responsibility of this (Goswami, 2021).

Respondent N described how the procedure for regular financial aid has not "kept up with Corona.". For her DUO[12] application, she said that she was asked to furnish work receipts from March to August, 2020, a period that falls in the middle of the first lockdown. She said, "I applied for DUO because I lost my bartending job. How am I supposed to get receipts? There have to be other ways during a pandemic, right?" She further stated that she did not know to what extent the university had a say in DUO's operations, but at least some kind of guidance and involvement would have helped.

The experiences of my participants mirrored my own, which is worth turning to here. I, on the advice of my study advisor, wrote to student dean, M. A. Merton, explaining my situation and need for financial help. I spoke with the dean over a telephone interview where she said that my case does not qualify, as I have not been delayed (according to her) *directly* due to Corona. Her explanation was that I was not diagnosed with it and none of my family members (who are all on another continent) were either. I was asked to explain my situation to her in an email, giving a full description of my mental health and other issues that have caused the delay. I never heard back from her. My study advisor said that she and another dean were of the opinion that I do not qualify. She was told that I was still "welcome to apply" via the formal channel (which is through Osiris) where I would have to explain the same thing again. I did apply, to predictably receive a lengthy rejection which can be summarized to being told that I "did not try" hard enough to finish my studies and therefore Corona did not have an impact on me in a way that could be recognized as deserving of financial help from the University.

The gradation of financial help (and other rules) indicates how institutionally there are three distinct categories of students: Dutch, EU/EEA and Non-EU/EEA. Even during a crisis, the aid provided differs significantly with Dutch students having been offered fee restitution as a corona benefit. A significant aspect of financial aid offered to non-EU/EEA students is the amount. For Graduation Support, it is an amount of €425, - for a maximum period of three months and (as mentioned above) the financial compensation allowed by the Dutch government is €535, - for each student (a one-time amount). Respondent L applied for graduation support but found it "very limited" as this amount, for three

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[12] Student finance ('studiefinanciering' in Dutch) is a funding service for university students distributed by the Dutch government's Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs (DUO) and is only granted to EU/EEA students (Utrecht University, 2020i)

months would be the same as what she pays for tuition in a month. Respondent R said, "we pay more than 9 times the institutional fee." "I (as an international student) am dealing with layers and layers of fundamental problems and money is one of them. I do not think these inequalities are taken into account. There is very little institutional empathy." To elucidate this in numbers: the yearly statutory fee for most Humanities Masters programs, for a full-time student for the academic year 2020-2021 is €2.143, - and the institutional fee is €17.078, - per year. The aid amount (up to €450, - per month for a period of three months) too, is stipulated keeping the institutional fee in mind: for students who pay the higher statutory fee, this compensation/aid (when one does secure it) is hardly any aid at all. As Respondent C says, "the proportion is totally off." No other aid or support of this kind is available and there has not been any conversation (that I or the respondents have come across) around it. This disparity also lays bare the student who is considered the standard: it is the Dutch student or EU student paying the lower fee. This is an example of how institutional spaces assume certain bodies as 'the norm' (Ahmed, 2012; Puwar, 2004).

Respondent RC, who had been a student member of the University Council said, "the general view of the Executive Board at that time at least, was that international students are valuable to us but that, at the end of it, it's their choice to have come here." According to RC, the Board seemed reluctant to take responsibility for issues like the housing crisis and its impact on students, especially those from abroad. "They made it clear that housing is the municipality's job", he added. This notion of "choice" was also reiterated by Respondent Duque, several times during our interview. This notion, however, is problematic and during a crisis could also be harmful. Respondent Duque had said that the international students "had the option to go back home if they wanted," further emphasizing the element of "choice". Though there might have been many students for whom "going back home" might have not been a choice at all for various reasons, there were many international students (like myself) who did not have that choice to leave due to international travel bans. Individual choice should also not be a factor in the attempt to create a safer environment during a global crisis.

Respondent L spoke of this idea of 'having a choice' and said: "It was my choice to be here, but I am also paying more than 1000 euros per month, only in tuition." Perhaps one of the more irksome traits of the way the UU acts towards international students is the lack of any accountability to them even as consumers. There is a growing body of work critiquing the neoliberal university and the reduction of students to consumers (Inayatullah & Gidley, 2000). As Achille Mbembe says, "the task of the university from then on is to make them happy as customers" (Mbembe, 2016, p. 31). And yet even

making students "happy as customers" does not seem to be a priority.[13] As Respondent R said, "I don't think it's worth it. If I wasn't on scholarship, I would've been quite unhappy by what is being provided." The lack of transparency is even more apparent in the way the statutory fee structure is not broken down. Respondent M talked about how, after some negotiations, the students at UCU were given a small fee reduction, "They just gave us a receipt with €1000, - removed, no breakdown of the fee was provided." An itemized receipt would have made the process more transparent as the student would have been able to see what they are being charged for. The students are recruited for their "talent", charged a higher fee, and yet are reduced to "walking money bags" (Nicholls-Lee, 2021). As Haneen Abu El Hessen, an international student from Lebanon at University of Groningen, stated in an interview with Dutchnews.nl:

> You want to feel like you are in a learning environment where you are supported, where you are cared for, where you matter – not where you are just a walking money bag and they don't really care what happens to you after you've paid your tuition fees. (Nicholls-Lee, 2021)

This support could be extended by the University also in terms of opportunities for dialogue. Respondent C had been part of a small group of students in her department who had written an email to the university advocating for fee restitution as so many International students were struggling to cover costs. The email was sent by her "on behalf of the international student community of the Humanities department" and stated that their concern is with the "physical campus amenities" portion of the high institutional fees. Since these amenities have not been utilized by students since March 2020 the email requested for "a partial refund of the part of the tuition that points towards campus facilities." "We ended the mail saying that we 'hope of discussing ways of working through this together' but never got a response." At the time of writing this thesis, the email remained unanswered. Respondent C described the whole process as "most frustrating", adding, "It is a horrendous shame, I think, that in a situation like this the University doesn't even seem to have considered fee restitution for International students."

I asked Respondent Duque if, she had, as a member of the University Council, been privy to any information regarding reduction of tuition fee for international students. She said that they had broached the subject but that the "university is not responsible for the tuition fee amount." This is a common misconception regarding the institutional fee. Unlike the statutory fee, the institutional fee

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[13] It is important to mention here that I am aware that institutional apathy is also a by-product of neoliberal consumerism.

is, in fact, a matter dealt with by the individual university. As dutchnews.nl reported, a press officer for education minister Ingrid van Engelshoven said that "there are no calculations per type of group of students by nationality" and that "the government is not responsible for the institutional rate and is therefore not responsible for any discounts to it". He also stated that "[i]t is up to the university concerned to give a discount on the institutional tuition fee rate for the academic year 2020-2021." Any discounts exceeding the government budget of €1084 (per student), he said, must be "borne by the institution itself" (Nicholls-Lee, 2021). Since Respondent Duque is a student representative and was not aware of this distinction, it is perhaps safe to conclude that this issue was not given much thought by the University Council. "These processes take a lot of time. We can try but nothing can happen overnight," Duque added.

A telling example of institutional apathy in UU is that the ITF report from 2018 hardly mentions what the UU could do to create a better, more helpful environment for international students who are, quite often, new not just to the Netherlands but to Europe as well. The only mention that is made is on the issue of the acute housing crisis in Utrecht, where the report opines that it might be preferable for the UU to "to adjust the internationalisation goals" (Utrecht University, 2018, p. 7) if a solution cannot be found. This kind of institutional apathy towards student well-being was therefore evident also in pre-pandemic times. This mindset is what seems to have had spilled over, reproducing the same systems of exclusion, which have been worsened by a global crisis. In Sara Ahmed's description of diversity work within the institution of the university, she says that there "is the feeling of coming up against something that does not move, something solid and tangible. Institution becomes that which you come up against" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 26). This feeling of being encumbered by this solid wall, whose inner workings are unintelligible, is what Ahmed describes as "banging your head against a brick wall" (Ahmed, 2017). This metaphor for institutional processes as "brick walls" one is set against and cannot move beyond is a feeling seven of the respondents have expressed. Respondent K called institutional responses to the problems of international students "cold" while Respondent I answered with a vehement "no" when asked if the university had helped at all during the pandemic. Respondent C said that though they did write the mail requesting a partial refund, no one could adequately say who the responsible party is in matters like these. "They don't tell you who you are dealing with, which department this is under. No one answered." It is unclear what the break-down of the institutional fee is. I could not find any relevant information on how the current fee amount was agreed upon. [14] For

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[14] "Dutch universities receive a government subsidy only for students who satisfy the nationality criterium (therefore EU students qualify) and have not already obtained a bachelor's or master's degree from a Dutch higher education institution. Such students are referred to as 'subsidized students'. They are eligible for the statutory tuition fee" (Maastricht University, 2021).

any kind of conversation of partial restitution, therefore, there would have to be a transparent break-down of the fee amount.

The sympathetic view of students struggling with the pandemic expressed on the UU website does not seem to extend to the university's financial aid provisions (Utrecht University, 2021c). The virus may have "[messed] up" lives (as per the quote I started section 1.2 with), one would still need to prove that it has messed it up enough, and in a manner that was verifiably "beyond one's control", to be eligible for any financial help. The acknowledgment that it has had effects on students "even when you're not sick" is not something that translates to financial aid opportunities (Utrecht University, 2020d).

1.2.2: Striving for 'wellness': mental health support during a global pandemic

On the same webpage I ended the last segment with, several "tips that might help" are listed. The first are two newsletters meant for 1st year students and "senior students" respectively, both of which "[pay] particular attention to assistance with your studies and tips on how to relax." The rest range from links on exercise and meditation, tips on how to deal with e-learning and screen time and a Facebook support group titled: "UU Social Distancing Support International Students & Staff" (Utrecht University, 2021c)." The UU has adapted well and has done a lot," said Respondent Duque. She further explains that the UU has offered aid for mental and physical well-being. The former was done by putting in extra resources to make 15-minute appointments with student psychologists. She said that this worked very well because there was hardly any waiting time. Aid for physical well-being was offered through the Olympos sports center that organized various outdoor activities like dance classes in the open air. Six respondents in this study had not availed themselves of these opportunities. When I talked about the efficacy of a Facebook support group, Respondent N said that she feels that would be counterproductive, as a social media page would cause her more anxiety: "I would need some time away from the screen and I also would find it difficult to share anything on an impersonal social media page. I don't know how this is helpful." Respondent L said that she had joined some Facebook groups hoping for some conversation and sense of community to ease the isolation she was feeling. These, however, were not helpful to her apart from the occasional Dutch news updates about government measures that were posted.

Attending a Wellness seminar: whose wellness is it anyway

For this study, I signed up for one of the 'Wellness seminars' the university had made available as a resource for students struggling in different ways during the Corona lockdown(s). The one I attended was held on the 11th of February 2021 visa Microsoft Teams. Conducted by 'Wellness Trainers', who are otherwise Study Advisors at various departments, these seminars are aimed at helping students better manage the new challenges one faces regarding attending classes and working from home. The one I attended was held at 13:00 CET. Though the participant list had indicated a larger group, I attended the seminar with only one other student. The student I attended with was Dutch and in the first year of her master's . She was struggling to focus during online classes and write papers during the lockdown. She said she would take notes during the classes and try to write but could not. This made her feel defeated, and she would move to other things to distract herself. She was also battling mental health issues. The Wellness Trainer proceeded to offer suggestions about what she could do. She also underlined the importance of not "punching oneself" during this difficult year, but to start small and see how that goes-adding that perhaps this year was more about learning about oneself than one's field of study. The trainer's positive and empathetic demeanor and suggestions would, I am sure, be helpful to many beleaguered students, especially ones looking for motivation and ways to categorize one's life and complete tasks during a lockdown (Goswami, 2021). What struck me from the format and the way things were conducted is the implicit *who* this seminar was intended to help. It is not entirely possible for international students to spend time "getting to know themselves" during the academic year, as the costs of that, literally and metaphorically, would be a lot more than what Dutch and EU students would have to bear. Advice on categorizing tasks, keeping ones focus and motivation and having someone to talk to during an isolating lockdown are definitely very useful tools and skills. However, these presuppose that the student does not have other very pressing concerns that add to the already difficult situation, like finances to support rent, tuition and food, visa restrictions, stress stemming from being very far away from loved ones, exacerbated mental health concerns to name a few, all while being in a (for some, completely) new environment, during a global crisis. As Respondent N said about the mental health surveys and checks the university sends emails about, "filing these out doesn't help me. Being told to breathe in and out and manage my stress doesn't help me. Some financial aid, maybe less study load [would help me]." Respondent R called all email communication from the university "rather delusional" and an exercise in not addressing actual problems.

The university, since the start of the Corona crisis, has been sending regular emails updating students on information regarding the virus and the UU's response to it. There are also surveys and questionnaires sent via email to gauge how the students are experiencing working and managing

tasks during this time, especially during the isolation of the two lockdowns. On being asked if they had filled out these surveys/questionnaires, all except one had said that they did not feel compelled to do so since they did not think it would lead to anything. Respondent N, who did fill out two surveys, mentioned being exhausted from being on "survival mode" and that she did fill out two questionnaires, one on the "quality of education and the other was something about student stress levels." She said for the latter, "everything was a 10, all my stresses." Most of the respondents expressed that they did not think that these individualized, anonymous attempts at gauging one's mental health would lead to any actual institutional action.

Other resources

Another resource extended by the university has been, "free modules focused on stress, mood, procrastination or Covid-related complaints through Caring Universities" (Utrecht University, 2020a).[15] The UU posted a survey on the basis on mental wellbeing, I was part of the 9.6% that had taken this extensive survey (Utrecht University, 2020a). What struck me about this survey was that no suggestions were elicited from students: there were no questions about what the "caring" implies to students or how it is perceived. For a survey entitled 'Caring Universities' it seemed to shift the focus and the responsibility from the university to the individual student. As a popular meme (Existential Comics, 2019) doing the rounds on social media suggests, depression being compartmentalized into an individual malaise, "a brute biological fact", takes away the need to address its actual systemic causes. This is thrown into relief especially during a global crisis that has exacerbated existing issues and has created additional ones. As student L said, "I have been depressed since my first year here. I faced racial discrimination[16]. None of it was taken seriously. My mental health is a result of things I encountered here."

Among the respondents, only Duque expressed satisfaction at how the UU had managed the crisis. This is significant because the sample-size in question, albeit small, did represent a cross-section of the international student (including EU) population at UU. These observations also echo the sentiments of various students in the Netherlands whose experiences have been published on various portals like DUB and Dutchnews.nl. The analysis above makes it clear that most of the aid (financial or otherwise) was formulated taking the needs of the Dutch/EU students into consideration. UU

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[15] Caring Universities is a collaborative project between the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Universiteit Leiden, Universiteit Maastricht and Universiteit Utrecht that aims to "provide clarity on the mental wellbeing of students of these four universities and offer them tools to work on their wellbeing in an easy way" (Utrecht University, 2020a).

[16] Taken up in more detail in Chapter 3

seems to be operating on the principle of internationalization wherein foreign "talent" is welcomed but their particular issues and grievances are not considered. A raging global pandemic is a crisis that exposes and exacerbates, this form of exclusion – it does not create it.

Weima, in his interview with DUB, said that internationalization "should be about talent" but has now been needlessly "politicised" (DUB, 2021). However, education policy is always inherently political (Moynihan, 1975). The meritocratic utopia is based on the idea that "the best and brightest should be able to study, work and succeed anywhere in the world, liberated fully and finally from the chains of any and all discrimination whatsoever – including discrimination based on national citizenship" (Brown & Tannock, 2009). The words constantly being associated with internationalization have been "talent" and "merit", both of which are then proven by a set of rules that constitute "satisfactory progress". The reiteration of these words is indicative of their importance in the justification of the presence of international students and is evidenced by the fact that the maintenance of "Satisfactory Academic Progress" is essential for a non-EU international student to be able to retain their student visa. While the coronavirus pandemic has had tremendous impact on student morale and performance, this preoccupation with "merit" has not just had implications on financial aid provided by the University. For non-EU students it has had significant impact on their visa status and therefore their stay in the Netherlands (and the EU) because of the visa regime's stringent pre-requisites. This is taken up in detail in the following chapter.

In the previous chapter, I spoke at length about the implicit meritocratic ideal impacting the aid provided by the UU to International students, during a global crisis. Those from outside the EU are affected in a multitude of ways as their 'performance' has the direct correlation to their visa status and therefore their stay in the EU. This chapter will be an exploration of the relationship between the University (UU) and the visa regime and how it affects non-EU international students, especially during a global pandemic.

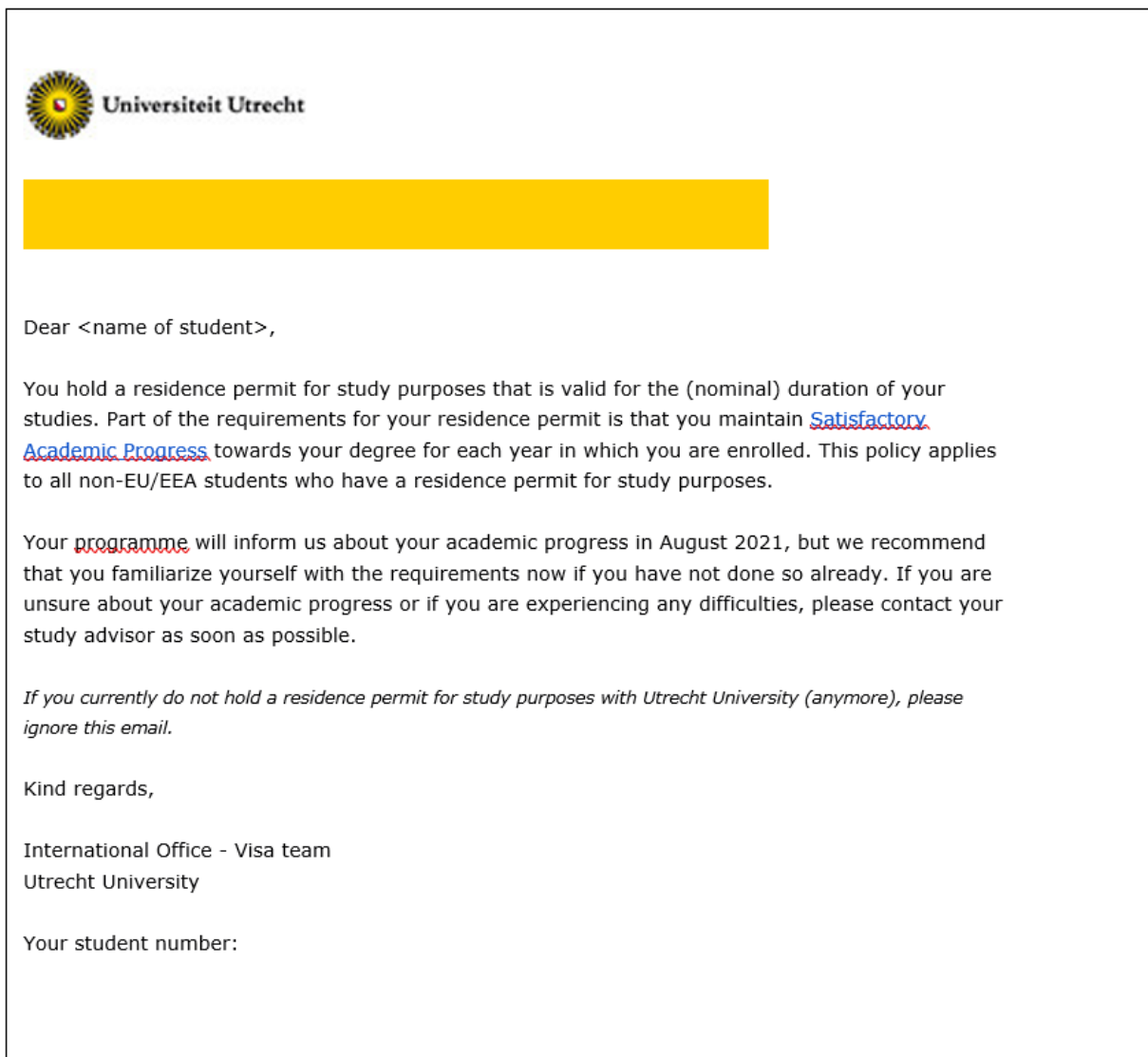### 2.1: A brief introduction of the visa system and its requirements

Figure 1: email 2021

The above email is sent to international students, twice a year, as a reminder of their student visa being contingent upon specific rules and requirements. These requirements form the 'Satisfactory Academic Progress' rules, which include finishing at least fifty percent of the 'normal study load'

(Utrecht University, 2019b) each academic year (See Appendix IV for full list of requirements). The inability to meet these can lead to the cancellation of one's residence permit and the revoking of one's student visa. A "third country national" (non-EU/EEA student) accepted to a university programme must obtain a student visa. For this, one must furnish a lengthy list of documents, such as bank statements, antecedent certificate, and passport. After being vetted by the IND, one is allowed to enter the country via a "Provisional residence permit" (MVV) (Immigration and Naturalisation Service, 2021b). An international student can also be deregistered, and have their visa revoked, if the student fails to pay their tuition fees.

In the Global North the international student population is seen as a "pool of preferred potential immigrants", as they contribute to the idea of countries in the West being "a magnet for talent and investment" (Chen 2007). In the Dutch context, this is seen in the "Highly Skilled Migrants Scheme". Here students who graduate from Dutch universities can apply for a year-long "orientation year" (*zoekjaar/search year*) wherein they can turn their "work year" visa into a highly skilled migrant visa provided they find a job that suits certain criteria, including a minimum salary bracket and an employer who can furnish a work permit (Immigration and Naturalisation Service, 2021b). This is indicative of the efforts of the Netherlands to attract more skilled labor while attempting to internationalize its higher education sector. However, this is not as simple as it seems, as one is forced to ask, based on the email I began this chapter with, what happens if one fails to abide by these rules of "satisfactory progress"?

Nada and Araujo (2018) have succinctly identified some problems with the internalization attempts by western universities. They elaborate as follows:

> Despite growing attempts to decolonise and internationalise curricula and student experience more widely, the exposure to discriminatory epistemic violence is still a common experience among a growing number of student migrants who pursue their studies at prestigious European (or western) universities. Surprisingly, such epistemic discrimination is also reflected in much academic literature on 'international' higher learning, teaching, and scholarship which is dominated by 'deficit' discourses where student migrants are primarily seen to 'adapt', 'adjust', or 'acculturate' themselves to taken-for-granted 'academic standards' (Taylor and Ali 2017). For Marginson (2014, 8), this 'adjustment paradigm' is in itself deeply rooted in European intellectual tradition and echoes the long emphasis on social order in functionalist social science, '…which prioritises normalisation and assimilation of migrant populations, including temporary migrants such as mobile workers and international

students.' These highly ethnocentric views on adjustment have real consequences on the social and educational experiences of international student migrants. (p. 386)

"Satisfactory Academic Progress" requirements, therefore, can also been seen as a reiteration of this abovementioned "adjustment paradigm". These indicate the existence of an "academic standard" that is sacrosanct – an example that Ploner and Nada, in drawing on Gayatri Spivak's work, opine constitutes epistemic violence. In this chapter I will further argue that the refusal to engage with the visa regime, and the concomitant bureaucratic confusion that ensues, is harmful to international/migrant students, especially during a global pandemic.

Though this chapter is mostly concerned with the experiences of students of color from "developing nations", it is important to mention here that all students with non-EU/EEA passports would need a student visa to pursue a study in the Netherlands, including those coming in from 'developed nations' like the United States and Australia. (Immigration and Naturalisation Service, 2021a). However, it is of significance that Nuffic offices are distributed only in the countries of the Global South, like India and China, that are of "strategic importance" to the internationalization of Dutch education (Nuffic). In what way these countries are of "strategic importance" is not spelled out. Respondent Kramer added that Nuffic had offices in countries "the Netherlands has some historic connection with." Therefore, there was a deliberate push towards popularizing the Netherlands as a viable destination for higher study among potential students in developing countries. This manner of recruitment by universities in the Global North has garnered significant criticism. Some scholarship has been dedicated to extrapolating how these attempts emulate "elitist colonial power/knowledge structures on a global scale" (Ploner et al. 2017) and how this trend is a form of neo- or re-colonisation, which only serves to deepen inequality (Ling & Giridharan, 2014; Nada & Araújo, 2018; Ploner & Nada, 2019). Students of color from "developing" nations often find that "implicit otherness" is "reinscribed upon their bodies", which is then "used to discount their lived experience, their words, and their research" (Parker, Smith, & Dennison, 2017, p. 234). Three out of the four respondents of color that I interviewed commented on feeling "foreign" most of the time, with Respondent L saying that she has heard from many of her friends (other international students from China) who have complained about "feeling marginalized". Respondent K expressed similar feelings of foreignness at his institution. In chapter three I will further elaborate on this topic of "othering". It is important to note that these instances are fairly common. Universities are often ill-equipped to handle these forms of discrimination and the ensuing feelings of alienation they might cause (Nada & Araújo, 2019).

2.2: A gap in scholarship

In the academic literature available on International/migrant students from the global South recruited by Western universities, there has not been sufficient engagement with the question of visas and the entry restrictions several international students in the Netherlands (and the EU) face (Brooks & Waters, 2011) There exists some critical work on displaced migrants, refugees and Dutch students of color in the University context, but not much on the mechanism of restrictions and control that form the visa regime. This chapter is an attempt to fill this gap by outlining the issues the visa regime creates and how they affect International students especially during a period of global crisis. The gap in academic literature on the subject can perhaps be attributed to the element of choice (and therefore privilege) that is associated with being an international student. The very high institutional tuition fee and significant living costs can also contribute to this idea which can then lead to less interest in the subject altogether (Utrecht University, 2020f). Ploner et al. (2019) see international student mobility as a manifestation "of postcolonial heritage" and see this as an important avenue of studying migration (p. 355). They state:

> international student migration can also be seen as an escape from restrictive social environments, limited life prospects, political oppression, and economic precariousness, and can thus serve as a springboard for long-term international career mobility (Findlay et al. 2017). Seen from this angle, education-motivated migration is closely intertwined with other concurrent forms of labour migration, exile, and diaspora (p. 376).

The visa regime is a geopolitical issue, and privilege here is relative. Many EU students might have the means while also having the privilege of a passport that allows them unrestricted access to places. They would also have access to financial aid in the form of a student loan by DUO, where the interest rate is at this moment zero percent (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs, 2021). As Ranu Basu suggests, "[e]ducational spaces... are imbued with multiple purposes and meanings where the ideologies of the state and its corresponding discursive and material realities become discernible" (Basu, 2019). This is perhaps most clearly highlighted in the university's liaising with the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND). The former's refusal to engage with the issue in any critical way, which I will explore at length later in the chapter, is particularly relevant to this thesis.

This chapter proved difficult to write, as despite many attempts I could not find much material on the visa regime and the feelings of alienation it causes, particularly in students. In the absence of this, I dredged through experiences of my own that I had found particularly demotivating in my time as a student in UU. Therefore, in addition to literature analysis, I will also be using autoethnography along

with material from the interviews conducted, to ground my investigation. To reiterate what I outlined in the Introduction, I use autoethnography because this research tradition allows one to connect, "the researcher's personal experience and the phenomenon under investigation" (Foster, McAllister, & O'Brien, 2006). During my studies, there have been some obstacles I have faced as an international student who did not meet the requirements of the satisfactory academic progress policy.[17] Having not made "satisfactory progress", I was told by my Study Advisor that the visa office and the dean in charge had said that my student visa would have to be canceled. She said that she was trying to figure out a way for this to not happen. She asked me to meet with the dean responsible, Drs. Frank Peters, in case he could help me with my situation where I faced the revocation of my student visa during a pandemic. At the same time, I had to find and finish an internship in the Netherlands as a mandatory part of my Gender Studies masters. Many confusing days followed which I will elaborate on in the following section, as they help to illustrate the circuitous nature of UU bureaucracy.

2.3: Of visas and institutional walls

In this section I extrapolate on my experience with university administration regarding my student visa issues, as described in 2.2. I will use autoethnographic material as a "'a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context" (Humphreys, 2005). This section highlights my own feelings of exclusion and helplessness at having found myself against another 'institutional wall' (Ahmed, 2005; 2016): the UU's reluctance to engage with complex student visa issues.

My meeting with Drs. Frank Peters took place on the 18th of August, 2020 and can be described, at best, as confusing and frustrating. His questions, I felt, did not pertain to the topic at hand. He asked me why I went home in October 2019 and stayed for two months when I "should have been working". I explained that I could not go home during the summer because of financial constraints and the next best option was October. The trip was planned for only 15 days, but I fell very ill and needed to be hospitalized (for which I had written proof). I was advised to not travel for a bit which is why my stay at home had to be extended. I did book my tickets back as soon as I could, perhaps a bit too soon as I lost consciousness on the flight and needed assistance from the airline staff. I was significantly behind in my coursework already and my ill health did not help.

On the matter of my visa, I said that the IND website listed several reasons that may excuse a student who does not have enough credits to retain the visa. There are six reasons listed and one excuse could

be used only once (See Appendix V) (Immigration and Naturalisation Service, 2021c). I had used one of the valid "excusable reason(s)" before and I informed him that I would be grateful if he could discuss my options with me. To this, Drs. Peters threw his hands in the air and said, "These are not issues we can deal with. These are political in nature and are decided by the government. We have no control over this." I responded by saying that there does seem to be more provisions for extension in the IND website, and the pandemic could fall under an "exceptional circumstance". He refused to acknowledge my suggestions and said that the "university cannot do anything" and instructed me to "do what is needed and not just write emails", with barely concealed derision. I had to explain that I had to write to people because I was not told what necessary 'official' steps I would need to take. I was also considerably anxious as this was about me losing my right to be in the Netherlands and I did not know what consequences that would have for my programme and prospects.

One of the many things I found significant in this exchange is how him *not having control* was reason enough to not care to know. As a student dean, Drs. Peters did not expect himself to know about the rules enshrined in the IND regarding the status of international student visas. This highlights how little this subject is considered because it apparently pertains to government policies that one ostensibly cannot have any control over and therefore is pointless to discuss. This is emblematic of what Gloria Wekker has termed the "very deep sense of conformity within the Netherlands, like whoever is in power you follow them" (Wekker, 2020). This unquestioning obeisance, she says, is an example of how "white innocence" is "so woven into the Dutch state" and can be found "everywhere" (Wekker, 2016; 2020). The meeting with Drs. Peters drove home to me how little those in authority at UU had sought to familiarize themselves with IND policies for visas that affected their own students. Drs. Peters refused to engage with me regarding the issue and I could not be guided towards anyone who would or could. When I asked if this would hamper my chances at applying for an orientation/search year visa (explained above), he said that "the university cannot give you any research visa." When I explained that it was a "search" year visa, he seemed confused and said, "all that is not possible, but I will check the IND website". I said that I had already gone through it, and it indicated that one can apply for it individually, but I wanted to be certain. He seemed to be completely unaware of this provision and added that I "can of course come back on a tourist visa or get a job". Both these unsolicited suggestions betray a complete lack of understanding of how the visa regime operates for passports like mine.

The gesture of throwing one's hands up in the air in resignation by those in university administration came to represent the lack of accountability that I have come to associate with institutional processes within the university. It is a progression one is not warned of - that the openness is more *performed* in

certain emails and in Diversity and Inclusion literature and rarely translates to an actual interest in the individual international student's experience. In my various attempts to reach out to different people in positions of ostensible authority within the university network, only the Marketing and Communication division was forthcoming. The other emails (see Appendix III) are generally replied by someone else than by the person written to, like a secretary. The replies ranged from "not having enough time" to catering to each individual student to the email "being forwarded to the designated department", without any indication to what that department might be. The lack of awareness and the reluctance to engage in any conversation regarding visas is indicative of what Gomez calls a 'gap' between the discourse and the practice of internationalization. "[A]dapting curricula and programs for the recruitment of large numbers of international students cannot be mistaken for adopting pedagogical and institutional practices that actually acknowledge students' migration processes, difficulties and diverse backgrounds" (Escobar Gómez, 2019, p. 120). This also holds true for UU's approach. It is essential to recognize the "ongoing colonial structural elements that cause feelings of worry and distress" (Escobar Gómez, 2019).

Drs. Peter's offhanded suggestion of just 'getting a tourist visa' also highlights this lack of awareness. Applying for a tourist visa with a passport like mine would mean having to furnish a plethora of documents to prove the legitimacy of one's intentions to travel. As a researcher and activist from Uganda, Bathsheba Okwenje (2019) eloquently says:

> The tax we pay is emotional of having to prove we are worthy and deserving of this privilege. And we have to prove it at every point: in collating all the documentation required for the visa; engaging with immigration at the port of arrival; interacting with the people who we have travelled to experience feeling a need of justification. Then there is the toll of a possible rejection – a rejection which will affect every subsequent visa application for the rest of your life, because whether you have previously been denied a visa is a specific question on applications. This rejection becomes yet another obstacle to overcome, another area for you to prove that you are indeed worthy of travel and of being in a country that is not your own.

Okwenje articulated the many processes in which the visa regime is exclusionary to many - International students, especially from the Global south experience this 'emotional tax' in many forms. I juxtapose this with German PhD scholar Carolin Dieterle's experience:

> Passing worry-free through airport controls, I am often unaware of the privilege that comes with my passport. But this small worn-out 3×5-inch booklet carries enormous weight and reflects my country's geopolitical status. As a German national, I am granted visa-free access or easily receive a visa upon arrival in 167 countries in the world, according to the. (LSE, 2019)

Most passports from developing countries rank much lower in these markers. The visa regime is not just an example of unequal access, but also of the added burden of an "emotional tax" that people of color from developing countries bear. Emotional tax is the "combination of feeling different from one's peers [because of] gender, race, and/or ethnicity and its associated effects on health, well-being, and ability to thrive" (Travis & Thrope-Moscon, 2018). One's student visa precariousness (and reminders of the same) is another way in which this emotional tax is levied. Neoliberal globalization involves an entirely new governing rationality through wherein everything is "economized": the highly skilled immigrant visa is an example of this as it is a mobility allowed because of perceived economic advantage/human capital (Mbembe, 2016, p. 39). The implication (one implicitly upheld by the university too) is that a Non-EU international student has to *prove* their *economic* viability to explain their presence. This trend is apparent in the student visa in the form of the "Satisfactory Academic Progress" requirement where one's academic performance is scrutinized. One is therefore constantly (made) aware of the precariousness of one's presence – contingent upon one unerringly "performing satisfactorily" to prove one is worthy to be in this country, which is not their own, to reiterate Okwenje's words. As Mbembe says, "racial power still structurally depends on various legal regimes for its reproduction" (Mbembe, 2016, p. 44). Decolonization therefore must include ways to "radically transform the law" (Mbembe, 2016). Disrupting colonial processes would mean 'making space for criticism and complaint from students and faculty who trouble the status quo.' (Parker, Smith, & Dennison, 2017). There cannot be a way to transform policies without adequate engagement and interest on the subject. For this, it is necessary that some conversation takes place, and institutional apathy and the reluctance of those in power to broach the subject will only hamper this process. It is not just about something *that cannot helped*, but about the *refusal to engage.*

2.4: The institutional labyrinth

The refusal to engage accompanies another institutional malaise: the bureaucratic labyrinth. An example of this is illustrated by the conversation I had with my Study Advisor after my meeting with Drs. Frank Peters. I expressed to my Study advisor, my dissatisfaction in the way Drs. Peters handled the situation and his lack of knowledge of visa procedures even though he was the person (ostensibly) in charge of student visas in UU. To this she informed me that I was asked to see Drs. Peters about the corona aid and not for the visa issue (See Appendix III for email exchange). This was contradictory information to me as in our email exchange it was suggested that the meeting was about my visa. This confusion and contradiction in information is emblematic of the UU's inability to create specific channels through which International students with visa issues could get the necessary answers.

This confusion also extended to the information given to me about when I would have to leave the Netherlands (EU). I was told that a cancellation of my visa would mean that I would have to leave the country by the 30th of September 2020. The email informing me of this was sent by my Study Advisor on the 5th of August 2020 wherein she informed me that due to the pandemic the IND would not "check this intensively" but I was "to make my own plans." This, it turns out, was not correct. If a student visa is not extended, the student is allowed to stay in the country for the duration of the last visa, which in my case was the 1st of December 2020. I was told I had one month to leave the Netherlands when, in fact, I had three. On the 9th of June 2021, my Study Advisor sent me another email informing me that the Visa department had asked about the status of my visa and the required extension. I informed her that my visa was not extended last year, something she had been privy to. To this she replied that she would "inform our dean that you can be taken off 'the list'", presumably a list of International students with visa requirements (See Appendix III for email exchange). For the purpose of this study, I asked her some questions about the process and *who* the dean she was referring to was. To this she responded that she "cannot be of much help here", that she does not know "if they have a list that they work from". She said that the "IND requires the university to perform a check on the visa students as to make sure that they are actually studying at UU" and that this is done by "the student deans at university-wide level" and that she is "not sure what deans work on this". I could, she added, write to the head of the Student Affairs department directly with my queries. This evasion of responsibility even in providing basic information on the workings of University administration is a constant reminder of how these processes were not meant for international students and their precarious presence within the university and the country. One also cannot ignore the power dynamics inherent in these interactions, as almost all the university officials in positions of any authority are white and Dutch, and frequently unaware of both their positions of

relative privilege and the understanding of how to engage with a student encountering these particular issues. This connects to the work of Wekker on decolonizing academia as well as what Ahmed calls the difficulty or the impossibility "of decolonizing knowledge without also shifting the demographics of institutional power" (Ahmed, 2017). Wekker asserts that is not possible to decolonize the university with the current workforce that does not have the vocabulary to talk about it. This lack then is what creates the reluctance to engage, which then takes the form of evasion. This evasion creates a system wherein responsibility is passed on from person to person and the bureaucratic maze makes it difficult to find any answers. To employ a colloquialism here - the buck must (ideally) stop somewhere in order to provide institutional support for International students and their specific issues and queries. The pandemic has exposed this lack of support infrastructure within the policy framework of the university. One can, of course, argue that every single student's query cannot be answered by the rector, the deans or any one individual in a position of power. However, the same kind of treatment was meted out to the collective of international students that had gotten together to request for a fee refund. Moreover, if the ethos of diversity within UU is to create "a learning and working climate in which all students and employees feel welcome and appreciated", perhaps a student might expect some manner of aid or response, especially at a time like this (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, 2021). As stated above, there is very little clarity on whom one can approach for help as a student. The person one is supposed to speak to is the study advisor. But as Respondent I said, and my own experience highlighted, "[s]tudy advisors do not have any decision-making powers." They can only direct you to who *might* be able to help. Respondent L said that even though her study advisor had been "nice" and had kept in touch with her in "her personal capacity", she could not help in any practical way. During this interview, the conversation also veered towards the general efficacy of having Study Advisors as one's point of contact. Does this appearance of help, in reality, diminish the possibility of change? Could they be something akin to a "fantasy," as Sara Ahmed says, "of an open door"? The open-door analogy "is expressed as being willing to listen, I wonder if a fantasy of an open ear might operate in a similar way to a fantasy of an open door, as if anyone can get in when in fact they cannot" (Ahmed, 2016). Study Advisors seem more to fall in this "open ear" approach. It is not the crack in or an attempt at "chipping away" at the brick wall one might hope it to be (Ahmed, 2016). Moreover, allegiances are implicitly brought up in these exchanges, as Respondent N stated: "It was quite clear to me that Study Advisors are loyal to the university, and sometimes that means they are not on my [the student's] side." It is also important to create a space for this conversation for peers in the university classroom, as it is an "important entry point" for decolonization in praxis (Parker, Smith, & Dennison, 2017). During our conversation, Respondent K narrated an incident where his department had decided on the yearly field trip destination would be Scotland. He said that he and two other classmates who had passports from developing countries had

to bring it to their attention that they would need a separate visa to enter the UK. This would mean more paperwork and they would need more time to prepare as they were also unaware of the procedure. He said that all his classmates were "shocked" to hear of this though "we are of course used to it." Though a significant impediment to mobility to many students, the visa regime is seldom discussed in the classroom. The classroom, though, may just be our *first* entry point into having this conversation. There is a plethora of literature that argues for critiquing of power relations not just in the world "out there" but bringing this sensitivity into the classroom (Parker, Smith, & Dennison, 2017). An attempt at addressing and understanding inequities between members within the classroom can engender dialogue and collaboration "*in a discussion that crosses boundaries and creates a space for intervention*" (hooks, 1994, p. 129). This, especially in the face of institutional apathy, could be a crucial starting point. As Parker et al. (2017) suggest,

> When we call students into the work of decolonising knowledge production, we do so knowing that for some students, this is their only way of being in the university: their lived and embodied experiences preclude the possibility of not asking these questions. For other students, we are upping the ante and asking them to make their own paths more difficult by performing the work of the feminist killjoy who troubles the waters, works through discomfort, asks hard questions, and commits to practising forms of research that require more time and effort. (p. 244)

These "lived and embodied experiences" when shared have the potential to disturb the status quo by beginning to ask pertinent questions, questions that can be taken up by other "killjoys" until at least a dialogue happens. The corona crisis has made this conversation even more urgent.

The UU website's home page has "[h]ow we are working towards a better world" as its central marquee and then lists how UU is doing that through (among others) cutting-edge research on the Coronavirus pandemic: working "interdisciplinarily to combat the virus and to find solutions to the social issues that the virus brings with it" (Utrecht University, 2021b). UU, in its espoused ethos of "working towards a better world", positions itself as a space where transformative ideas are allowed to incubate. The "social issues" this virus brings are not just the ones it has created. Very often these are issues that this crisis has merely exposed. It is not possible to work towards "finding solutions" without taking into account issues of geopolitics and governance, as they have direct repercussions on inequities within the classroom. They also have a direct bearing on university policy and implementation, and it would be apathetic to not weigh in on. As Valerie Amos (2018) in her article on the role of universities in decolonizing knowledge suggests, "[a] recognition of the context and

backdrop, as well as the interplay between regions, is critical when economic, political and policy decisions are being made. Universities, as knowledge creators themselves, play a vital role" (Amos, 2018). To not encourage for these conversations would be detrimental not just to those affected but also towards the goals and ideals espoused by the university. It would be imperative then that Study Advisors, in particular, familiarize themselves with topics related to visa requirements. Being the first point of contact between the student and the university administration should also necessitate them to be aware of the chain of command within university bureaucracy. The absence of this makes navigating these already complex processes more circuitous, arduous, exclusionary, and harmful than they need to be. Issues of significant import like visas must be dealt with better understanding and a clear line of communication – and perhaps someday, with greater compassion. In the following chapter, I discuss routes within the University which have the potential to engender dialogue to this end so that different voices can be given the opportunity to be heard.

Chapter 3: Discussing Institutional routes towards a more inclusive University- what is and (a little) of what could be

You know what really breaks my heart? How my black friends and I always get called for photo shoots for brochures and yet none of our problems are taken into account. We are just for show.

Respondent M

'I have that a complaint is not a starting point, but it is how my conversations start'

Sara Ahmed, Complaint as Diversity Work

Contrary to the quotes I decided to begin with, this chapter is about hope. In chapters 1 and 2 I highlighted how the 'global war for talent' (Brown & Tannock, 2009) has had implications for International students, rendering their specific issues invisible. This is particularly harmful during a global pandemic as International students are not given the aid needed. Chapter 2 also highlighted the necessity of encouraging and creating a space for conversation between university authorities and international students for any constructive change to happen. This would require an understanding and highlighting of how institutional apathy and opaque systems have created an environment that is exclusionary towards International students. Various scholars have attempted to explore possibilities to reconceptualize the university as a caring, more 'humane' space based on decolonial praxis (Dawson, 2020; De Jong, Icaza, Vázquez, & Withaeckx, 2017; Escobar Gómez, 2019; Madge, Raghuram, & Noxolo, 2009; Mignolo, 2009; Santos, 2010). The urgency of these explorations has been highlighted by the way the Coronavirus pandemic has affected vulnerable students. But a crisis can also be a huge opportunity, and change 'usually only happens under external pressure' (Brandenburg, 2020).

In this chapter I will discuss two institutional routes that can be possible ways of systemic change- complaint processes and institutional diversity policies. I will discuss the current processes at UU for both and draw on material from the interviews I conducted, conversations with the interviewees and scholarship available on complaints and inclusion/diversity. It is important to note that neither of these routes are inherently decolonial. This is true especially for diversity and inclusion practices in their present iterations (Arshad, et al., 2021; Doharty, Madriaga, & Joseph-Salisbury, 2021; Essed, 2002), aspects of which I discuss in this chapter. Nonetheless I find these important to engage with as they are existing institutional routes that have the potential to "let people in" (Ahmed, 2009) and in doing that make space for different perspectives that then can lead to institutional change.

My contention here is that engendering dialogue within the university is important as the first step towards any systemic change. This dialogue has to happen both with university authorities and among students to create more awareness about international students, especially those from the Global South. To work towards institutional decolonization, awareness of these unequal (and particular) dynamics is essential and for this the conversation must begin somewhere (Escobar Gómez, 2019). In this creation of a space for dialogue, this chapter is about hope: hope in a way of teasing out current problems from systems that have transformative potential.

A strand of thought that has emerged in decolonizing the University has been that of 'working against the institution' while being in it (Harney & Moten, 2019; Icaza Garza & Vázquez, 2018). Perhaps one way of 'stealing' (Moten and Harney, 2019) power from existing institutional mechanisms is to use the Complaints procedure. I have relied heavily on Sara Ahmed's work on diversity and complaint mechanisms within the university. The quote from Ahmed I started this chapter with is one that resonated with me – complaints are the site where conversations start, where the students can express their needs beyond what they bring to the university as 'talent' or 'merit'.

3.1: Complaints, objections, and appeals: an opportunity for dialogue

I begin this section with a summary of the procedure 'Complaints, Objections and Appeals' of the UU (Utrecht University, 2020c) in order to provide a background for later analysis. A *complaint* refers to conduct towards one, and a complaint about a general rule or scheme cannot be made. For suggestions on a general rule, one can go to the Study Desk, one's Study Advisor or the complaints coordinator of one's faculty or department who can advise on the course to take. Complaints can be either informal or formal – the former can be aimed at the person it concerns or can be discussed with the Study Advisor of one's faculty or department. Each faculty has been assigned a Complaints Coordinator who can give the requisite advice. Formal complaints are possible if a complaint is 'severe' (Utrecht University, 2020c) or cannot be solved informally. One can file a complaint either to the faculty Complaints Coordinator if the complaint is about the faculty/department or to the University Complaints Coordinator if it is a complaint about central university services.

There is another section that deals with 'serious misconduct that includes inappropriate behaviour like: (sexual) harassment, discrimination, aggression, violence or bullying through the *Committee for Inappropriate Behaviour*. This committee can be contacted through a 'Confidential Advisor for Inappropriate Behaviour for education, shelter, supervision and mediation.' The two Confidential Advisors listed are Marian Joseph and Drs. Frank Peters. I was surprised to see Drs. Frank Peters listed as one of the two Advisors. My conversation with him (as elaborated in Chapter 2) had not inspired

much confidence in me, and this lack of confidence now had spilled over to the process itself. I wondered whether a complaint could actually be made about a Confidential Advisor since there are only two of them. The UU's choice of Confidential Advisors is also telling as both Advisors represent bodies that are the norm in UU (Puwar, 2004)- the page gives us very little information on them, but one google search proves that they are both Dutch and white. If my experience with Drs. Frank Peters was any indication, he would probably not be very sensitive to the needs and grievances of an International student. This to me, proves a lack of sensitivity towards the particular diverse needs of International (POC) students as there is also no explanation given about the appointment of these particular people to this post. This is another example of the reluctance to speak about race and its implications on POC students/staff within the context of a majority-white University (Lewis, et al., 2021; Wekker, 2016). This reluctance is also evidenced by UU's Inclusion and Diversity policies, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

Respondent K said that in one of her classes, her teammates for a project bullied her. "I felt I was being targeted because I'm Asian and they didn't know how to deal with me. They were also not from my study programme so I didn't really know them too well." She later went to her programme coordinator, who asked her if she was sure the bullying was racially motivated. "I could see that she didn't really believe me, that [she thought] I was overreacting. But if it's not racism, what would motivate them to treat me badly? It's not like they knew anything else about me to bully me [for]," she said. She was told that she could complain if she wanted to but that the process would be arduous and long. "I didn't want to be stuck doing that, I already had enough to do. It also sounded like my programme coordinator didn't think it would amount to anything. One of [the teammates] later admitted that they were targeting me. So, turns out it wasn't in my head," she added.

Bullying is listed as one of the more 'serious' forms of misconduct, but even then, Respondent K's first point of reference here, her programme coordinator, did not take the matter seriously. "They questioned me, I felt like I had to prove it. How can I prove that I was bullied? Talking to the coordinator cause me 'second harm', I would say," Respondent K added. When I asked her if she tried to reach out to anyone else, she said that her Mentor[18] was "too busy" to help and by that time she "felt severely depressed and had no energy left." Her experience of trying to complain left her discouraged and is akin to what Ahmed's reflection that 'the more you complain about bullying the more you are bullied' (Ahmed, 2017); the process itself sometimes bullies you into not complaining.

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[18] Some departments assign a professor as a Mentor after they have divided the students into smaller groups.

Though there is enough information on the Complaint procedure on the website, there is very little on what happens *after* a complaint is made. Unlike in the situation with visas described in Chapter 2 where one did not know what the procedure was, it is heartening to see that there is clarity on *who* one can go to in case of a complaint. We do not know of the life cycle of the complaint-how it proceeds and what one can expect. As such if one's first point of contact is not supportive or encouraging about helping with the complaint, a student, especially an International student, would find the process arduous and confusing enough to give up. Another issue is the 'severity' of the complaint or the misconduct that merits a complaint (as elaborated above). How and who would decide the severity of the complaint/misconduct? These have not been adequately outlined in the information about complaints. Unless less obvious issues of (racial)micro aggressions[19] are written into UU's complaint policies, these instances of (racial) aggression will go unnoticed. It is important to state that microaggressions are not just racial in nature. My emphasis on race here is based on the experiences of my interviewees of colour and my own – we all have stories of racism to share. Race has been a contested topic in UU[20] (Klaasman, 2020), with many articles deeming the University 'too white'. As outlined in the previous chapter, instances of racial othering are common. Students and employees of colour at UU have spoken out about racism being a 'climate' in UU in DUB magazine (Klaasman, 2020). Various accusations of 'reverse racism'[21] were seen in the comment section of the article-further highlighting the need to discuss how endemic racism is in UU. Though an in-depth exploration of the subject is beyond the scope of this thesis, it has to be acknowledged here as an exclusionary practice towards international students of colour. "All this inclusion and diversity talk is just that- talk. The moment they go home they don't believe in inclusivity," said Respondent M. She went on to say that she has received many "passive, backhanded" comments, one of which stood out for her. She was at an event with her classmates and some professors from UU/UCU when a discussion ensued

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[19] Microaggressions generally refer to everyday exchanges that send insulting or denigrating messages to people from marginalized groups (Lui, Berkley, Pham, & Sanders, 2020).

[20] This reluctance is symptomatic of Dutch culture's denial of racism - To quote Gloria Wekker from an interview, "The thing that makes it so difficult, with respect to academics, to people in media — who regard themselves as very progressive, 'We are non-racist by definition' — is that it is harder to hold them accountable for racist behaviour if it is all over the place. They project racism onto 'lower-class people' but have this excellent image of themselves —'We're good, we're fine' — whilst doing the most racist things (see Wekker et al., 2016)" (Jafe, 2018).

[21] "The 'reverse racism' card is often pulled by white people when people of color call out racism and discrimination, or create spaces for themselves … that white people aren't a part of. The impulse behind the reverse racism argument seems to be a desire to prove that people of color don't have it that bad, they're not the only ones that are put at a disadvantage or targeted because of their race. It's like the Racism Olympics. And it's patently untrue" (Blay, 2015).

about an article Prime Minister Mark Rutte[22] had written about "Doing Normal". The letter was about Rutte saying that there are 'some people' who do not respect Dutch culture and do criminal things like stealing bags and those people should be told to 'act normal or go away'. To this one of the professors chimed in and said, "people who steal your bags, you mean people who look like [Respondent M]?" "He laughed and no one said anything", she said. "I was so shocked I couldn't even get myself to say something. No one else did either," she added.

Respondent M's contention that 'inclusivity' is not practiced and only preached is reflected in my experiences too. In one of my classes in my very first block at UU, a professor's response to me saying that the text we were reading was not contextual, was "maybe you think that because it wasn't written by a person living in a village in India." I did not quite know how to react and whether it was 'bad enough' to elicit a response from me. I also was not quite sure why the vitriol in class was directed towards me, considering my white, British classmate had expressed the same sentiment right before I had. I knew something about the comment made me uncomfortable, but I was not sure what. It was only a few days later that I realized that his statement was racist and unacceptable. But I was wary of even suggesting that it was a racist jibe. Respondent M also admitted that she had felt she would be deemed "too sensitive and unable to take a joke." This is reflected in various studies on microaggressions where students of colour "were often at a loss about how to address these types of discriminatory experiences because they did not know if they were being 'too sensitive' about certain situations" (Lewis, et al., 2021; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). My classmates, who were present in my class with the professor, later decided to recount the episode to other people from my department, including some professors. There was a fair bit of righteous indignation, and yet, individual displays of shock and anger do not accountability make. Neither do snippets of hearsay that suggest that 'we've heard these complaints about him before.' If there have been complaints, the question then is what is broken in the system that this is allowed to happen this often?

This is perhaps what the difference in Corona aid between Dutch and Internationals is symptomatic of, which is summarized in Respondent R's words: "We are clearly held to different standards. We pay nine times the amount[23] and can still not feel and be protected. No effort was made even during a global pandemic." This feeling of 'not being protected' was also expressed by Respondent L. She said, "In class we keep talking about how white-centric things are and about power structures, and yet they practice the same without any introspection. This confuses me. When I tried to complain I was

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[22] This 'open letter' written in 2017, by the Prime Minister, Mark Rutte, was variously described as a "warning to immigrants" that they should "do normal or go away" (Dutchnews.nl, 2017).

[23] Respondent R was referring to the high institutional fee that non-EU/EEA students pay.

discouraged, I felt quite unsafe." "I think they think our problems are imaginary. If I say anything the usual response is 'why don't you just let it go,'" Respondent R had said. Respondent L's despair at having to prove that she was bullied carries on to her having to prove that the Coronavirus pandemic has affected her deeply and that she is deserving of financial aid. This burden of proof often leads to one giving up on the process altogether and 'let it go'-in my experience too, to reiterate what Respondents R, K, L, C and I had said, 'what is the point?'

This inability to create a space to complain can also be seen as an institutional block (Ahmed, 2017) that impedes on International students' feelings of belonging and general well-being (Johnson, et al., 2007; Lewis, et al., 2021; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). It is a block because despite there being a system of complaints in place, the space for it (specifically as regards International students) has not been created. Studies have also shown that (racial) micro/aggressions and discrimination faced by International students in the host country and institutional inabilities to address them not just hamper intercultural learning (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Madge, Raghuram, & Noxolo, 2009) but also hinders their academic performance (Tuitt & Carter, 2008). A robust Complaints procedure and a system where its encouraged could be the 'institutional plumbing' (Ahmed, 2017) necessary to tackle this block. This is especially important in a climate where there is mistrust of University authorities-respondents R, K, I, L and M expressed that they felt that even if they did complain, nothing constructive would happen. Respondent L, as mentioned above, felt like she was being actively discouraged from complaining in a formal manner.

In the previous chapters, I have spoken of internationalization and its vicissitudes, but in this context, numbers do seem to matter. The Complaints section of Maastricht University's (MU) website clearly states that there is a separate 'Complaints concerning the Code of Conduct with respect to International Students' (Maastricht University, n.d.). The 'code sets out standards for the higher education institutions in their dealings with international students.' (Study in Holland, n.d.). MU further states that students can complain if they feel that the Code of Conduct has been violated by the University. Only universities who have signed the code can admit International students (Study in Holland, n.d.) therefore it is safe to assume that UU is also a party to it. However, the existence of this code isn't communicated at all on the website- even in the Complaints section. MU (as stated in the Introduction) has the highest number of international students among Universities in the country. Respondent Duque felt that because the UU having fewer international students was one of the reasons why information pertaining to them was not prioritized by the UU.

Low numbers however should not be an excuse or a hindrance for the UU for not attempting to being more inclusive of its International students. As Respondent C said, "They need to make us part of the

conversation." If this exclusion can be seen as a block, a robust complaint system wherein International students' grievances are given a space and are taken seriously, could be seen as necessary 'institutional plumbing' (Ahmed, 2017). As Ahmed says, complaints inhabit the gap between what is 'supposed to happen' and 'what does happen' and are therefore testament to what should not happen (Ahmed, 2017). A space specifically for International students wherein they can express their grievances regarding both individual instances of microaggression and exclusionary institutional processes would encourage International students to participate in the conversation about UU policy. In the following section I discuss how the language barrier is exclusionary towards International students and how this needs to be addressed in UU's various attempts at promoting 'equality, diversity and inclusion' (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, 2021a).

3.2: Language, exclusion and opportunity at UU

During the interviews, a pertinent issue mentioned by the respondents has been that of language. Apart from the problems of getting used to a completely new culture and (sometimes) a new continent, International students have to also contend with the language barrier (Goswami, 2021). Respondent R spoke of an incident where she had an email exchange with a university staff member where she sent emails in English that were always responded to in Dutch. She shared this incident with a professor of hers who said that if she wants to study and live in the Netherlands, she should learn Dutch and that this email exchange was not an issue because 'we're in the Netherlands'. R had been in the Netherlands for just three months at the time and would not have had enough time to learn a language enough to correspond well with it. "It was even more shocking because this professor is usually quite sensitive about these issues," she said. Unfortunately, this sentiment is not uncommon and frequently adds to the alienation many students feel. The language barrier also connects to the lack of campus job opportunities for International students as a lot of the communication is in Dutch, so much so that two of the few surveys I could find about international students in the Netherlands recommended that Dutch language training be made more accessible to International students. This adds to International students feeling more disconnected as they are less a part of the University's working (Goswami, 2021). Respondent Duque spoke of her struggles with the language barrier as one of only two (and first) non-Dutch members of the University Council. She said, "[i]t was hard, even though we were given interpreters. Everything was in Dutch and I was trying to learn but it isn't enough to be able to keep up in an official meeting." In her article in DUB, she further explains how it made her feel and what this reluctance to hold Council meetings in English is going to end up doing,

I feel that the current multilingual policy of the University Council is simply putting up with non-Dutch speaking members' existence, making it so unpleasant that the inclusivity of international students and staff won't be a problem anymore because they will simply give up on participation or any type of further integration in the community. (Duque, 2021)

This is quite telling of the attitude UU administration has and their reluctance to make significant changes for inclusion of international students. Internationalization features among its goals many times (Utrecht University, 2018; 2020f) but the concomitant effort towards inclusion of such students into the decision-making roles offered to other students in lacking. Since language (and other) barriers are exclusionary towards international students, I decided to approach the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion office at UU to ask if they had any specific policies or plans in place to make UU's International students feel more included and 'at home'.[24]

I sent an email to drs. Brigitte Prieshof, Project manager at the EDI office, UU for an interview regarding the same. The response was from Jaleesa Latupeirissa who is a Project assistant at the EDI office, who told me that an interview would not be possible because they were busy and that the website has information that might be of use to me. I sent another email asking if I could speak with anyone else on UU's EDI team and was told that they get a lot of emails of this sort and that they 'do not have the hours to reserve time for it, in addition to our regular work' (see Appendix II). I was told that I could email them my questions that they would 'try their best' to answer and that I should refer to the EDI Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2025 and the annual review 2019-2020. The EDI website did not explicitly mention International staff and students, but outlined the EDI's commitment to 'to make a visible contribution to an inclusive university community, to a just society, and to equal rights and equal opportunities for all' (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, 2021a).

The EDI Strategy and Action Plan lists Internationalization as one of its components and only mentions a 2% increase in International staff from 16% in 2019 to 18% in 2020 (Utrecht University, 2018). After scouring the webpage I found no other mention of International students and staff and therefore could not make an assessment of how much International students and their particular issues figure on the EDI's agenda, if at all (Goswami, 2021). This experience exemplified for me the key issues discussed in the previous chapters – the institutional wall (Ahmed, Complaint!, 2021) that

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[24] The 'About' section of the EDI page starts with, "Let everyone feel at home at Utrecht University. We believe that diversity of students and employees enrichens the academic debate and that everyone deserves equal opportunities. We see it as our social responsibility to live up to this ambition" (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, 2021a)

blocks access to answers to questions, the responses that feel like they are coming "from a Bot" (Respondent R and Respondent I had mentioned this in their interviews) and feelings of exclusion that these inevitably create. The maze does not get any less labyrinthine - the brick walls are not made any less opaque.

There was another curious omission in the EDI objectives laid out in the Strategy and Action Plan- there was no mention of race or ethnicity. Wekker, speaking of her experience working for University of Amsterdam's Diversity Commission (Wekker, 2016), states that,

> The majority of them talk about is gender and internationalization. We need more women in higher positions and we need more international students; that is good for everyone. But then you want to delve a little bit deeper: what is your understanding of diversity? Nobody speaks about sexuality and religion, let alone about race. The reluctance to speak about those issues is very strong. Inclusive terms are not really used; people feel very insecure and there is a lot of discomfort even talking about it. Yet at the same time there is, again, that self-image of 'We are great! We are excellent! Everybody can come here. (Jafe, 2018, p. 556)

This problem of ambiguity in the language of diversity is that it does not clearly state 'the terms of inclusion'- 'it does not name a specific social category (such as gender, race and class)' (Ahmed & Swan, 2006), therefore hiding how these categories function. The lack of identifying the specific issues facing non-EU international students is an example of this.

I asked Respondent Duque if she felt that UU was doing enough to promote diversity and inclusion as it now has a Steering Committee for the same (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, 2021b). "Yes, they are, we even have a Dean now to look after Diversity and Inclusion" On being asked if any international students or staff were part of it, she said, "No, there are no Internationals in the Steering Committee, all the communication is in Dutch. One has to acknowledge the reality of exclusion," she added. There were no international student members, neither were there any internationals in the EDI committee that provides management and support for the programme (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, 2021b). The irony of acknowledging exclusion while talking of inclusion was not lost to me.

The EDI Steering Committee published a vacancy position for a student member on its webpage on 15th July, 2021. (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, 2021c). Apart from other qualifications, it would be 'highly desirable' for the candidate must have 'a receptive language skill in Dutch'. This is because '*all* the meetings and reports are in Dutch' – therefore, it is probably safe to say that this 'highly desirable' attribute is actually a pre-requisite. The UU's "concerted effort to attract international students to increase diversity in the student population," as Respondent Menno Kramer mentioned, has not been extended to including them in Diversity initiatives. It is significant that the student members are

supposed to, among other things, "stimulate and contribute to the formation of opinions on EDI topics in the Steering Committee. They use their networks to gather input where necessary and to bring the university's EDI policy to the attention of staff and students" (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, 2021b). This seems like a great opportunity of having one's opinion heard as a student- an opportunity International students would be deprived of. Students from 'various backgrounds' have been invited to apply – another example of using unspecified 'inclusive language' (Ahmed & Swan, 2006) (Wekker, 2016). Ahmed spoke of how diversity work becomes 'the work we do when we do not quite inhabit the norms of an institution' (Ahmed, 2018). And yet, UU deviates from this, as this small tokenistic space for some dialogue has so far been denied.

"We are just brochure students. They like to boast of how many students they have from different nationalities at UCU," said Respondent M. Sure enough, the 'About Us' section of the UCU boasts of its campus being 'home to 750 students with 70 different nationalities' (University College Utrecht, 2021). The implication here then is, as Ahmed and Swan say, "the college becomes diverse when racialised others arrive" (Ahmed & Swan, 2006) – their 'arrival' also establishing the institution's 'international' credentials. These credentials, in turn help in the University achieving higher rankings in Higher Education ranking indices- which in turn increase funding opportunities (Brown & Tannock, 2009) (Utrecht University, 2018). However these advantages rarely mean any improvement in policies in the inclusion of International students. Diversity and Inclusion then become little more than convenient 'catchwords' (Essed, 2002)- a 'cuddly' (Ahmed, 2007) comfortable concept that can make an institution feel better about itself without having to address the actual issue of discrimination (Ahmed, 2012; Essed, 2002).

The exclusionary environment I spoke of in this, and the previous chapters has had another outcome: the lack of any large mobilization of International students within UU.[25] This has had significant implications in Corona times as students have not been able to organize enough to ask for better compensation during a pandemic. As Respondent C says, "Maybe if there were more ways for students (especially non-EU/EEA) to organize, the issue of fee restitution (mentioned in Chapter 1) during Corona would gain some traction." She mentioned that she had heard that at the University of Amsterdam this has been picked up more vehemently because of student mobilization. "In UU", she says, "the student community isn't very strong." In scholarship on microaggressions in higher education, the need of spaces of people of colour to create 'counter spaces to connect with other students of colour and seek refuge from the daily onslaught of racial microaggressions they

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[25] In the previous chapter I outlined how student mobilization in other universities in the Netherlands had resulted in petitions that the Dutch government had to consider.

experienced in their everyday lives' (Lewis, et al., 2021, p. 1053) has been emphasized. Respondent Duque did not support this view, going on to say, "[t]o put it bluntly, I think a lot of international students play the victim and do not try to integrate and organize. It was my choice to be here, and I have to do my bit. Integration is a two-sided coin- we also have to make the effort," she added. This is significant because accusing someone of 'playing the victim' often implies that they have *complained* about something. One's inability to thrive in the space is then 'regarded as an individual rather than a structural shortcoming' (Dawson, 2019)- when you air a grievance, you become the 'location' of the problem, not someone merely exposing it (Ahmed, 2017). If the goal of diversity and inclusion is 'to create an environment in which everyone can succeed regardless of their social location, there must be a concerted effort to incorporate alternative ways of coming to know the world that better reflect the backgrounds, experiences and languages of the diverse bodies within the university' (Dawson, 2020). Respondent Duque did add that the period of stay for International students within the UU is usually short and within that time it is already hard to integrate - "politics and policy are usually at the bottom of the list for them." She added that the UU does "promote student representation, but somehow is unable to reach out to Internationals enough." But seeing International students as 'transitory' (Escobar Gómez, 2019) only adds to the justification of exclusion. This is the other 'reality of exclusion' as Duque calls it- the same patterns are, clearly, repeated in times of crisis as well.

Respondent M's frustration at being called for brochure photoshoots, as I quoted in the opening of this chapter, is reflected in what Ahmed (2018) calls 'embodying diversity' - 'by representing us they could represent themselves as being more diverse' (Ahmed, 2018) than they actually were. Diversity becomes about changing the image, not the exclusionary reality of the institution (Ahmed, 2018). But this does not mean that these systems cannot be changed - by 'refusing to be accommodating' (Ahmed, 2018) one can 'rock the boat' (Ahmed, 2018) towards creating better, more inclusionary systems by demanding institutional accountability.

In the first two chapters I outlined the need for a space for conversation within the University structure by highlighting the issues faced by International students and the need for institutional accountability. Some of these structural inequities between non-EU/EEA International students do stem from EU immigration policies, but institutions must be proactive in acknowledging and engaging with them to be able to create a more inclusive environment (Brown & Tannock, 2009; Escobar Gómez, 2019). The 'hope' I spoke of in this chapter, though perhaps hard to hold onto, is in continued resistance. As Respondent M said, "I have decided I will keep talking, regardless of the reaction. Someone has to listen." Perhaps this is what 'stealing' (Harney & Moten, 2019) from the

university could be, this effort towards starting a conversation and sustaining a sense of hopefulness -what Heinemann and Varela have termed 'respelling hopelessness' (Heinemann & do Mar Castro Varela, 2017). International students, especially those of colour, as 'space invaders' (Puwar, 2004) occupy that space in between the policy and the action of diversity. The institutional processes outlined in this chapter can potentially 'rock the boat' (Ahmed, 2018) and in doing so offer possibilities for a more 'humane' university (Dawson, 2020).

Conclusion:

The virus has mocked immigration controls, biometrics, digital surveillance and every other kind of data analytics, and struck hardest — thus far — in the richest, most powerful nations of the world, bringing the engine of capitalism to a juddering halt. Temporarily perhaps, but at least long enough for us to examine its parts, make an assessment and decide whether we want to help fix it, or look for a better engine.

Arundhati Roy, 'The pandemic is a portal'

This thesis demonstrated how forces of internationalization and the 'global war for talent' (Brown & Tannock, 2009) have led to the creation of harmful exclusionary environments for International students in the UU, the effects of which have been exposed and exacerbated during the Coronavirus pandemic. The UU's push towards internationalization and its policies have been akin to those of other Western universities, but the 'gap between the (its) discourse and practice' (Gomez, 2019) is highlighted by apathetic and opaque institutional processes that hinder dialogue and open communication.

Through interviews with a representative cross section of current international students at UU and autoethnographic material, I have highlighted the ubiquity of racial micro/aggressions against students of colour in UU and the impacts they have on their wellbeing. Though, to analyze these in more detail was beyond the scope of this thesis, its presence had to be acknowledged as it was mentioned in all the interviews I conducted with International students of colour. This brings me to a recent article published in DUB, that delved into UU's racist past and how it was 'knee-deep in slavery' (Agterberg, 2021). Its colonial past and how it continues to have an impact in UU's culture even today is a topic that merits further exploration. Respondent Menno Kramer opined that "UU, in a lot of ways, operates like an antiquated Dutch institution," referring, among other things, to the administration's resistance to using English as the language for the University Council– is this historical background, then, what continues to inform its current climate? This is significant when seen in the context of studies on how Western Universities benefit from their colonial/racist pasts. An exploration of how much these unequal power dynamics have been replicated in the current push towards internationalization, in the guise of promoting 'talent' across borders (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Brown & Tannock, 2009; Madge, Raghuram, & Noxolo, 2009) is a route that merits further research.

In an article on the growing number of international students in the Netherlands, the chair of Erasmus Student Network (ESN) Netherlands, Lupe Flores Zuñiga has said. "[i]nternationalization can be a huge enrichment for Dutch society and the economy, but that is only possible if the students are

welcomed" (ICEF Monitor, 2019). The pandemic has revealed that the aid (or lack thereof) has resulted in many feeling like they're little more than 'walking talking money bags who nobody cares about' (Nicholls-Lee, 2021). To narrow the scope of Roy's powerful message with which I began this conclusion to the microcosm of a university, one can see how the pandemic and the ensuing crisis has magnified the inequities that already existed. These cannot be wished away with statements like 'we are all in this together' – to paraphrase Braidotti (2020), we might be battling the same pandemic, but the specificity of our situations requires different approaches. It would be safe to deduce then that the University's response to the pandemic would also be emblematic of the university's attitude towards its international students, many of whom would be amongst its most vulnerable. It is imperative therefore, propelled as we are by a global crisis, to discard the faulty 'engine' and look for better, more intersectional policies of assistance (Buikema, 2020) and aid.

The UU website features multiple brochures and annual reports (for example, Utrecht University Fund Annual reports) (Utrecht University, 2021a) full of smiling faces and uplifting stories of students receiving help from various funds in UU. The stories in this thesis will probably not fit this happy image. This is part of what causes our discomfort while complaining, these stories of success are painted as the norm. Perhaps it is time then, to be visible not just as 'smiling faces' but with 'our (whole)beings' (Ahmed, 2018), refusing to be accommodating and as Respondent M said - 'to keep talking' and writing until someone, finally, hears us.

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Appendix I: Interview questions

This appendix shows the interview questions used for the interview's conducted for this thesis and the internship report (Goswami, 2021).

1) Which department and study program are you in?
2) What year of the program are you in?
3) Are you an EU/EEA student or an International (Non-EU/EEA student?
4) How has the pandemic been like for you? (about going home, daily activities, problems faced)
5) How has your experience at UU been during this crisis? How well do you think the University has responded to this crisis?
6) Do you feel supported by the University during this crisis?
7) What is your opinion on the financial aid facilities provided by UU?
8) What is your opinion on the surveys and mental health check emails the UU has been sending students?
9) Do you know of the complaint procedures at UU? If yes, how did you come to know of it? Would you have complained formally about anything if the complaint procedure was made more accessible to you?
10) How has your overall experience with the UU and your study programme been so far?
11) Do you think your experience of the University is significantly different from your Dutch counterparts?

Appendix II: Email exchange

The portions used in the thesis are in green.

From: Latupeirissa, J. (Jaleesa) <j.latupeirissa@uu.nl>
Sent: Tuesday, March 2, 2021 9:52 PM
To: Goswami, A. (Aneesha Goswami)
Subject: RE: Request

Hello Aneesha,

We get a lot of request for participation in surveys or interviews from students and organizations and unfortunately we do not have the hours to reserve time for it, in addition to our regular work.

Like I said before, If you have any further questions regarding these documents, you can send them to us by e-mail and we will do our best to answer them.

Thank you for understanding.

Kind regards, Jaleesa

From: Goswami, A. (Aneesha Goswami) <a.goswami@students.uu.nl>
Sent: maandag 1 maart 2021 17:32
To: Latupeirissa, J. (Jaleesa) <j.latupeirissa@uu.nl>
Subject: Re: Request

Hi!

Thanks a lot for your email! Is it possible to interview any one else from the committee? I would be very grateful if I could speak with someone as a D and I input would be very helpful in my study on UU's international students. I could send the questions in advance and also keep the interview very short.

Do let me know if that's possible,

Thank you,

Regards, Aneesha

From: Latupeirissa, J. (Jaleesa) <j.latupeirissa@uu.nl>
Sent: Monday, March 1, 2021 9:56:52 PM
To: Goswami, A. (Aneesha Goswami) <a.goswami@students.uu.nl>
Cc: Prieshof, B.M. (Brigitte) <B.M.Prieshof@uu.nl>
Subject: RE: Request

Dear Aneesha,

On behalf of Brigitte Prieshof I want to thank you for your e-mail. Unfortunately it is not possible to conduct an interview with her, due to a lack of time and several deadlines a.o. for the Diversity Month March.

We do have a lot of information on our website that may be useful to you, such as our EDI Strategy and Action Plan 2021 - 2025 and annual review 2019-2020. More information about the mission, vision and goals can be found on this page. If you have any further questions regarding these documents, please send them to us by e-mail and we will do our best to answer them.

Kind regards,

Jaleesa Latupeirissa MA | Projectmedewerker Equality, Diversion & Inclusion (EDI) Office | Universiteit Utrecht | Tel.nr: 06-48434802 | Diversity nieuwsbrief | werkdagen: maandag, dinsdag & donderdag

Jaleesa Latupeirissa MA | Project assistant Equality, Diversion & Inclusion (EDI) Office | Utrecht University | Tel.nr: 06-48434802 | Diversity Newsletter | working days: Monday, Tuesday & Thursday

Van: Goswami, A. (Aneesha Goswami) <a.goswami@students.uu.nl>
Verzonden: donderdag 25 februari 2021 11:07
Aan: Prieshof, B.M. (Brigitte) <B.M.Prieshof@uu.nl>
Onderwerp: Request

Dear Dr.Prieshof,

I am an international student doing a masters in Gender studies in UU. My current research project is on international students at UU.
I found your contact on the Diversity and Inclusion page of the UU website. Would it be possible for me to secure an online interview with you to discuss this? I will be very grateful for your insight on this from a D&I perspective. Do let me know if that would be possible.

Hoping to hear from you soon,
Thank you.
Regards, Aneesha

Appendix III: Email exchange

From: Kramer, N.F.M. (Nyncke) <N.F.M.Kramer@uu.nl>
Sent: Thursday, August 6, 2020 7:04:39 PM
To: Goswami, A. (Aneesha Goswami) <a.goswami@students.uu.nl>
Subject: RE: Extension of your residence permit

Hi Aneesha,

 I decided to aks Frank directly after all, I am afraid that the visa office will not be able to answer this question, and you have already mailed them as well. So I have emailed Frank Peters, and will check for his reply, and let you know.

Best wishes, Nyncke

Van: Goswami, A. (Aneesha Goswami) <a.goswami@students.uu.nl>
Verzonden: donderdag 6 augustus 2020 11:42
Aan: Kramer, N.F.M. (Nyncke) <N.F.M.Kramer@uu.nl>
Onderwerp: Re: Extension of your residence permit

 Hi Nyncke,

 Sure sure! Sorry for the barrage of emails!

Hope you have a nice holiday

Aneesha

From: Kramer, N.F.M. (Nyncke) <N.F.M.Kramer@uu.nl>
Sent: Thursday, August 6, 2020 11:37 AM
To: Goswami, A. (Aneesha Goswami) <a.goswami@students.uu.nl>
Subject: RE: Extension of your residence permit

Hi Aneesha,

I understand your questions, but unfortunately I cannot answer it.

I would have to ask this to the visa office / dean. I could do so with you in CC, I hope you can then follow up the emails, since I will not be working the next weeks. Ok?

Best, Nyncke

Van: Goswami, A. (Aneesha Goswami) <a.goswami@students.uu.nl>
Verzonden: donderdag 6 augustus 2020 11:34
Aan: Kramer, N.F.M. (Nyncke) <N.F.M.Kramer@uu.nl>
Onderwerp: Re: Extension of your residence permit

Hi Nyncke,

I've already asked for an appointment and got the response that they'll get back to me in 5 days because of corona related delays.

I was looking at the ind site and it says 'inability' to study as a reason. Could a pandemic be reason for that, as it exacerbated my condition and also made it harder for me to switch to the one year master for which I do have sufficient credits?

I'm just clutching at straws here.

Thank you,

Regards, Aneesha

From: Kramer, N.F.M. (Nyncke) <N.F.M.Kramer@uu.nl>
Sent: Thursday, August 6, 2020 10:37 AM
To: Goswami, A. (Aneesha Goswami) <a.goswami@students.uu.nl>
Subject: FW: Extension of your residence permit

Hi Aneesha,

The check on your study progress will be done in September. I am afraid it looks like your residence permit will have to be cancelled, as you have not yet made the 30 EC, and you have used the legitimate excuse of sickness last year.

If you have any more questions on this, I advise you to contact the visa office, ánd Frank Peters, the dean who deals with this expertise. This will ensure you receive answers as soon as possible.

studentcounsellors studentcounsellors@uu.nl

Visa visa@uu.nl

You can keep me CC in the mails if you would like to, I would like to stay informed.

Best, Nyncke

Hi Nyncke,

I Got this mail which means everything will be finalised in September then? It's also saying I can re enrol.

Thank you for your mail,
Aneesha

Dear Aneesha Goswami,

Thank you for submitting your validation of the residence permit process in Osiris Online Application.

You've indicated you require an extension of your current residence permit. Please allow us to explain how we will proceed:

First we will have to await the results of the annual Satisfactory Academic Progress check, which will take place early September.

We will be notified if you've met these requirements, upon which we will start an application process in Osiris Online Application to allow you to take care of your extension. This will happen halfway through September.

In the meantime you can use your current residence permit to re-enroll.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Should you have returned to your home country due to corona, please note the following:
You must inform your study programme if you want to study online. If you will not return to the

Netherlands for your studies this september, please let us know at visa@uu.nl. *Your residence permit will have to be cancelled. It is a requirement that you live in The Netherlands and are registered with the municipality.*

Kind regards,

International Student Admissions - Visa team
Utrecht University

Your student number: 6074030

Appendix IV: Satisfactory Academic Progress

Progress Students who have a residence permit for study purposes through Utrecht University are required to maintain satisfactory academic progress toward their degree requirements for each year in which they are enrolled, and to be in good standing (i.e. pay tuition on time and meet other University requirements).

This policy applies to all non-EU/EEA students who have a residence permit for study purposes.

Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP), as described below, is evaluated once a year, after the second semester. Failure to maintain satisfactory progress may result in cancellation of the residence permit.

Standard for Satisfactory Performance

Undergraduate and Graduate students must complete at least 50% of the normal study load towards their degree in each academic year.

Treatment of Repeated Course Work and Failed Courses

For a course that is repeated, credits can only be counted once. A failed course does not earn any credits.

Unforeseen circumstances

It is possible that, due to unforeseen circumstances such as prolonged illness, a functional disorder, or serious family circumstances, a delay in your academic progress can occur. If you wish to have such circumstances taken into consideration, you must contact your study advisor as soon as possible so that he or she can determine whether your circumstances qualify for an extension of your SAP.

Please note that only specific circumstances can be taken into account to make an exception to Satisfactory Academic Progress and that a reason for delay can only be used once during your studies.

Denied Status

Students who fail to complete 50% of the normal study load (= 30 EC start in September) and have no circumstances that can be taken into account to make an exception are placed on Denied Status and will receive a formal decision made by the Director of Student & Academic Affairs. The

University is required by law to report the status to the Immigration Services (IND). The IND will proceed to withdraw the student's residence permit.

Objection

A student can lodge a notice of objection only in the case that he/she is of the opinion that unforeseen circumstances were in fact the cause of the study delay. The notice of objection needs to be submitted within six weeks after the decision has been made by the Director of Student & Academic Affairs. In case the objection is granted, the student is placed on Probation Status for the semester/term rather than on Denied status.

Appendix V: What is a valid reason?

A valid reason means an excusable reason. These are listed in the Higher Education and Research Act. These are:

- illness

- physical or sensory impairment or other functional disorder

- pregnancy

- exceptional family circumstances

- board duties

- the inability to study

How often can a student have the same valid reason?

You may only use the same excusable reason once with your educational institution.

Universiteit Utrecht

Faculty of Humanities
Version September 2014

PLAGIARISM RULES AWARENESS STATEMENT

Fraud and Plagiarism
Scientific integrity is the foundation of academic life. Utrecht University considers any form of scientific deception to be an extremely serious infraction. Utrecht University therefore expects every student to be aware of, and to abide by, the norms and values regarding scientific integrity.

The most important forms of deception that affect this integrity are fraud and plagiarism. Plagiarism is the copying of another person's work without proper acknowledgement, and it is a form of fraud. The following is a detailed explanation of what is considered to be fraud and plagiarism, with a few concrete examples. Please note that this is not a comprehensive list!

If fraud or plagiarism is detected, the study programme's Examination Committee may decide to impose sanctions. The most serious sanction that the committee can impose is to submit a request to the Executive Board of the University to expel the student from the study programme.

Plagiarism
Plagiarism is the copying of another person's documents, ideas or lines of thought and presenting it as one's own work. You must always accurately indicate from whom you obtained ideas and insights, and you must constantly be aware of the difference between citing, paraphrasing and plagiarising. Students and staff must be very careful in citing sources; this concerns not only printed sources, but also information obtained from the Internet.

The following issues will always be considered to be plagiarism:
- cutting and pasting text from digital sources, such as an encyclopaedia or digital periodicals, without quotation marks and footnotes;
- cutting and pasting text from the Internet without quotation marks and footnotes;
- copying printed materials, such as books, magazines or encyclopaedias, without quotation marks or footnotes;
- including a translation of one of the sources named above without quotation marks or footnotes;
- paraphrasing (parts of) the texts listed above without proper references: paraphrasing must be marked as such, by expressly mentioning the original author in the text or in a footnote, so that you do not give the impression that it is your own idea;
- copying sound, video or test materials from others without references, and presenting it as one's own work;
- submitting work done previously by the student without reference to the original paper, and presenting it as original work done in the context of the course, without the express permission of the course lecturer;
- copying the work of another student and presenting it as one's own work. If this is done with the consent of the other student, then he or she is also complicit in the plagiarism;
- when one of the authors of a group paper commits plagiarism, then the other co-authors are also complicit in plagiarism if they could or should have known that the person was committing plagiarism;
- submitting papers acquired from a commercial institution, such as an Internet site with summaries or papers, that were written by another person, whether or not that other person received payment for the work.

The rules for plagiarism also apply to rough drafts of papers or (parts of) theses sent to a lecturer for feedback, to the extent that submitting rough drafts for feedback is mentioned in the course handbook or the thesis regulations.
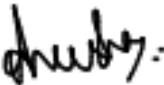The Education and Examination Regulations (Article 5.15) describe the formal procedure in case of suspicion of fraud and/or plagiarism, and the sanctions that can be imposed.

Ignorance of these rules is not an excuse. Each individual is responsible for their own behaviour. Utrecht University assumes that each student or staff member knows what fraud and plagiarism

entail. For its part, Utrecht University works to ensure that students are informed of the principles of scientific practice, which are taught as early as possible in the curriculum, and that students are informed of the institution's criteria for fraud and plagiarism, so that every student knows which norms they must abide by.

I hereby declare that I have read and understood the above.
Name: Aneesha Goswami
Student number: 6074030
Date and signature: *dhusby.*   20/08/2021

Submit this form to your supervisor when you begin writing your Bachelor's final paper or your Master's thesis.

Failure to submit or sign this form does not mean that no sanctions can be imposed if it appears that plagiarism has been committed in the paper.