



# Ethnic Diversity in the Recruitment of Diplomats: Why MFAs Take the Issue Seriously

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## Ethnic Diversity in the Recruitment of Diplomats: Why MFAs Take the Issue Seriously

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### Summary

Diversity and its management have become an issue in all organisations. Ministries of foreign affairs (MFAs) do not escape the issue. In the 2000s, states decided to consider more ethnic diversity in the recruitment of their diplomats. In some countries, this new goal requires affirmative action programs. This article is based on three case studies. The first case study analyses two Western countries — France and Norway — where MFAs have to reflect the diversity of immigration in their societies. The second case study analyses the case of Brazil, a country where the legacy of slavery still causes discrimination in the recruitment of diplomats. The third case study analyses ethnic diversity in the MFAs of India and Singapore, which recognise multiculturalism or multiracialism. The study draws five comparative conclusions to generalise on why MFAs in the world cannot escape the challenge of ethnic diversity in their recruitment policy.

<sup>1</sup> The authors thank Jan Melissen and four anonymous reviewers for their useful comments.

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## Keywords

affirmative action – foreign services – diplomats – diplomatic practice – ethnic diversity – ministries of foreign affairs (MFAs) – public diplomacy

## 1 Introduction

In recent years, diversity and its management have become topics for debate in all kind of organisations. As the editors of the *Oxford Handbook of Diversity in Organisations* write, 'Diversity management practices have spread around the globe focusing on the organising and management of inclusion and exclusion of different genders, sexualities, ethnicities, ages, classes, and (dis)abilities'. They add that 'practicing diversity management and dealing with diversity in organisations is never without controversy'.<sup>2</sup>

As state organisations, ministries of foreign affairs (MFAs) do not escape the challenge of diversity. Before the Second World War, a vast majority of diplomats in Europe and the United States were mostly white males with aristocratic or middle-class backgrounds.<sup>3</sup> In the United States, it was after the Second World War that African Americans began to criticise the Department of State for its 'nearly all white composition, [and] pushed for the use of more African-Americans in the diplomatic field'.<sup>4</sup> In Western Europe, the second part of the 20th century saw a progressive change in the recruitment of diplomats as a result of migrations. The issue became salient as well for MFAs in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In Brazil, improving the representation of African Brazilians in the MFA by means of affirmative action became an issue of public debate in the 2000s. In India, the low representation of Muslims in public services came into light in 2006 when after a government committee submitted a critical report on their status. *Ethnicity* can, of course, be considered as a multifaceted term. In this study, *ethnicity* is defined as a category of people who identify with each other on the basis of presumed ancestries or on similarities as a common language, culture or religion.

The study of ethnic diversity has preceded the study of gender diversity in diplomatic services, even if the second has now produced a larger body of literature than the first.<sup>5</sup> Seminal books include Michael L. Krenn's study of

<sup>2</sup> Bendl et al. 2016, 1.

<sup>3</sup> David Cross 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Krenn 1999, 18.

<sup>5</sup> Cassidy 2017.

African American diplomats in the US State Department between 1945-1949.<sup>6</sup> Going beyond diplomatic services, there is a broader literature on the role of ethnicity and race in foreign policy,<sup>7</sup> including the use of ethnicity and race by Western diplomats during the colonial rule.<sup>8</sup> However, some studies on MFAs still do not mention a single word on the issue, even while their empirical scope concerns multicultural or multiracial states.<sup>9</sup>

This article is based on a case study approach. It starts from concrete cases including strong narratives to deduce explanatory variables and finally draws comparative analytical conclusions. The three case studies, corresponding to five national experiences, are very different but the authors assume, following Carsten Anckar's observations, that comparisons can be made from 'units of research, which are as different as possible'.<sup>10</sup> The reason for the case study approach is that there is no 'grand theory' for researching diversity in MFAs, as for diversity studies in general.<sup>11</sup> The most relevant method consists of interpreting how diplomatic institutions and MFAs produce ethnic diversity, how they experiment with it and how they tell about what they produce. The authors' research methods are eclectic. They collected material such as official reports of the MFAs and public bodies (as parliaments or state agencies), interventions in public debates (including the press) and interviews. However, interviews were not possible in all of the MFAs. The authors were able to conduct interviews with the Directorate for Human Resources of the MFAs in France, Norway and Brazil, but not in India and Singapore. In India, it is not in the habit of diplomats of the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) to give time to academics investigating their organisation. In Singapore, there is another reason: Ethnic diversity is officially a non-issue in the MFA and no diplomat is really prepared to talk about it with scholars.

This study is organised as follows. Section 2 analyses the case of two Western countries — France and Norway — where MFAs are facing the challenge of reflecting the diversity of immigration in their societies. Section 3 analyses the case of Brazil, a country where the legacy of slavery still causes discrimination in the recruitment of diplomats. Section 4 analyses the case of ethnic minorities in the MFAs of two countries, India and Singapore, which officially recognise multiculturalism or multiracialism as state policies. Finally, the authors draw five comparative conclusions from their case studies to answer the

6 Krenn 1999.

7 DeConde 1992.

8 Okoth Opondo 2010.

9 Rana 2009.

10 Anckar 2008, 390.

11 Bendl et al. 2016, 3.

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research question: What explains the contemporary interest of MFAs in the world to manage ethnic diversity in the recruitment of the diplomats?

## 2 Reflecting on Societies of Immigration: MFAs in France and Norway

With democratisation and educational changes, the public administrations of Western European countries, which include MFAs, strive to become and remain representative of their citizenship. As the ethnic makeup of their population shifts due to migration flows, new challenges arise. This section analyses the extent to which children of migrants or even first-generation migrants are represented in the MFAs of Western European countries. This case study analyses France and Norway, which illustrate both similarities and differences in how the issue has developed.

### 2.1 *The Narrative*

France and Norway differ in a number of relevant ways. France, which traces a story of statehood back to the 9th century, developed one of the first and most respected foreign services of the world, and conquered and maintained a colonial empire from the beginning of the 16th century until decolonisation in the 1960s. Norway on the other hand was part of multinational polities ruled from Copenhagen and Stockholm from the 14th century until independence in 1905. It had no foreign service (although some Norwegians served as consuls and ministers) and its involvement in European colonialism was largely indirect. The different histories of France and Norway, combined with different economic structures, have led to different relationships to migration. France, as a colonial power and an industrial country, became a destination for migrants from the 19th century while Norway did not have any significant long-distance immigration until the 1960s.

For the MFAs of the two countries, these different backgrounds produced different recruitment patterns for diplomats. In Norway, as Iver B. Neumann and Halvard Leira document, all diplomats had typical Norwegian names until the 1970s, and the first candidate with a non-traditional Norwegian name to be admitted to the diplomatic trainee programme was in 2003.<sup>12</sup>

In France, recruitment to the MFA was socially homogeneous from 1880 (date of the first exam to enter the career) to the Second World War. Most of the candidates came from the French bourgeoisie and aristocracy.<sup>13</sup> The situation

<sup>12</sup> Neumann and Leira 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Baillou 1984; Dasque 2005.

began to change after the Second World War. A diversification in the exam procedures allowed the Quai d'Orsay to recruit candidates with more diverse backgrounds. Special exams were organised in 1945 to recruit candidates who had been active in the French Resistance or had joined the Free French during the Second World War.<sup>14</sup> Some of them became famous French figures due to their parallel literary talent or political commitment: Roman Kacew (Romain Gary in literature), a son of Lithuanian Jewish parents, was born Russian in 1914 and was naturalised as a French citizen in 1935; Stéphane Hessel, the son of a German anti-Nazi writer and translator, was born German in 1917 and naturalised French in 1937.

During the Cold War, the Quai d'Orsay recruited several sons and daughters of Russian and East European émigrés in France. After the decolonisation process in the 1960s, the French MFA also recruited French citizens with North African or Asian family backgrounds, as attested by the names in the ministry directory — the *Annuaire Diplomatique et Consulaire* — published every year.<sup>15</sup> Most of these French diplomats with a migrant background, however, did not enter the Quai d'Orsay through the generalist exam of the *Ecole Nationale d'Administration* (also created in 1945). Rather, they entered through the specialised *concours d'Orient* requiring the knowledge of 'scarce' languages such as Russian, Chinese, Arabic or Vietnamese.

Actual recruitment procedures differ somewhat between the two countries. In France, there are at least five different types of exams to become a diplomat, while in Norway there is only one.<sup>16</sup> In both countries, entry is limited to around fifteen people per year. In the Norwegian state apparatus, all positions are announced with a specific formula where minorities are encouraged to apply. In France, only the striving for gender balance can be underlined. In both countries, it is forbidden for MFAs to ask candidates in the intake exams if they belong to an ethnic, religious or sexual minority. For this very reason, research on the ethnic origins of diplomats (or civil servants more generally) cannot lean on statistics and quantitative studies. In France, ethnic statistics are even strictly forbidden. In Norway, however, there is a voluntary question in the first and anonymous step of the recruitment process that can be filled out if candidates consider themselves as belonging to a minority. A number of candidates do define themselves as belonging to an ethnic minority. However, it is interesting to note that at the next stage, when applications are de-anonymised, many applicants with non-traditional Norwegian names

<sup>14</sup> Baillou 1984.

<sup>15</sup> *Annuaire Diplomatique et Consulaire* 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Neumann 2012; Lequesne 2017; Lequesne and Heilbronn 2012.

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do not tick the box.<sup>17</sup> In France, such a voluntary question is not put to the candidates.<sup>18</sup> Even if there are institutional desires in both countries to ensure more diversity, and the French MFA is even audited by the certification agency Association française de normalisation (AFNOR) on its achievement on defined goals,<sup>19</sup> individual rights not to be classified as an ethnic minority make it difficult to assess the results.<sup>20</sup>

Diplomats with migrant backgrounds have therefore become a reality in the MFAs of both countries. Most of them are children or grandchildren of migrants. If we look at the ministry directory in 2017, diplomats with North African and Asian names, indicating the foreign origin of at least the father's family, are the most visible groups. The General Consul to Beirut has a North African name, the Ambassador to Cambodia has a Vietnamese name and the Ambassador to Fiji has a Cambodian name.<sup>21</sup> The ministerial directory shows many other French diplomats having foreign names: Armenian, Egyptian, Iranian, Turkish. Names originally from sub-Saharan Africa are less numerous, and the reintroduction of two African languages, Mandingo and Hausa, at the *concours d'Orient* in 2017 is expected by the MFA to attract more candidates with a sub-Saharan African background.<sup>22</sup>

Some first-generation migrants do enter the French MFA, as the story of a diplomat born in India shows. This diplomat arrived in France when he was twenty years old with only a basic knowledge of French to study English and political science. He succeeded in the public examination to become an English teacher for eight years, and finally at the age of 34 passed the examination to become a *conseiller d'Orient*, with Hindi and Tamil as foreign languages. After serving two French Embassies abroad, he was appointed diplomatic adviser to France's Minister of Environment in 2017. In Norway, recruiting diplomats with a foreign background has been a trend since the turn of the 2000s. In recent intakes, trainees with one or two foreign parents can be found, but no first-generation migrants.<sup>23</sup> Some ethnic minorities are more represented than others at the entrance exams, for several reasons. First, differences in social integration exist among migrant communities, where relatively less integrated

17 Interview, Norwegian MFA, 24 August 2018.  
18 Interview, French MFA, 11 September 2018; Interview, Councillor, French MFA, 28 September 2018 (telephone).  
19 Interview, French MFA, 11 September 2018.  
20 Interview, AFNOR Executive, 14 September 2018 (telephone).  
21 *Annuaire Diplomatique et Consulaire* 2017.  
22 Interview, Councillor, French MFA, 28 September 2018 (telephone).  
23 Interview, Norwegian MFA, 24 August 2018.



communities, such as Somalis, see fewer members apply to the MFA. Second, in some integrated ethnic communities, becoming a diplomat is not particularly prestigious and young people might prefer to become lawyers, engineers or medical doctors rather than diplomats.<sup>24</sup> Finally, the strict procedure of security clearance can be an obstacle to becoming a diplomat in Norway. The procedure requires that a candidate is 'traceable' for ten years, which means basically having lived in Norway or in countries that exchange security intelligence with Norway. Some candidates with a foreign background cannot fulfil these demanding criteria and do not obtain a security clearance.

## 2.2 *Analysis*

Two explanatory variables stand out to explain why ethnic diversity has become a concern on the agenda of MFAs in Western Europe.

- 1 The first variable is the legitimacy of MFAs vis-à-vis their domestic society. In France and Norway, MFAs are still caricatured as corporatist fortresses dominated by white men from wealthy families. Today, women hold ever more senior posts and the social background of diplomats is more diverse, due to the democratisation of education and the increase of social mobility in Western societies. The lack of ethnic diversity comes as an additional concern to gender issues in countries where social integration of migrants is discussed with controversial terms in the public sphere. These societal debates, in turn, trigger concerns inside the MFAs on how to change their existing image as being aloof from the reality of society.
- 2 The second variable is the image that Western states endeavour to project in the international system. If France and Norway as liberal states want to retain some influence in an international system, which is less and less Eurocentric, they have an incentive to stress the multi-ethnic nature of their societies. As a Norwegian senior diplomat says about the Norwegian MFA: 'We can't all be blond French-speaking girls.'<sup>25</sup> Having MFAs with diverse ethnic backgrounds helps consolidate the image of a country as open to the 'other'. In this case, the issue of ethnic diversity is directly linked to the priority of public diplomacy based on making a good fit with global perceptions.

<sup>24</sup> Interview, Norwegian MFA, 24 August 2018.

<sup>25</sup> Interview, Norwegian MFA, 24 August 2018.



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There are, however, limits to what MFAs are prepared to do in Western Europe with diplomats coming from ethnic diversity.

1 A first limit concerns the reluctance to send diplomats to countries of family origin for legal reasons. Double nationality, for instance, does not allow diplomats to benefit from diplomatic immunity in a posted country where they also are a citizen. They can be arrested and judged in the country of posting, whereas diplomats benefiting from diplomatic immunity cannot be prosecuted and will just be expelled in case of problems.<sup>26</sup>

2 A second limit is the reluctance to send diplomats to countries of family origin because of the relationship of diplomacy to ‘estrangement’.<sup>27</sup> As Sasson Sofer writes, in the practical world of diplomacy, the diplomat has to ‘be a stranger to others and estranged from himself’. This estrangement is supposed to be ‘an inherent part of the diplomatic practice and beneficial to the accomplishment of the diplomat’s mission’.<sup>28</sup> MFAs thus do not like to post diplomats in countries where they have strong family connections because they suspect a risk that they will not stay strangers. As the French diplomat with Indian origins says, ‘I am fluent in Hindi, but I may probably never be posted in the subcontinent, because I am considered too close to the society of the host countries’.<sup>29</sup> A diplomat with a migrant background, who is a stranger due to their personal experience of diversity, is paradoxically suspected of being a strong native. Here is a contradiction between assuming the importance of more ethnic diversity in the recruitment of diplomats and an established practice of diplomacy, which remains based on the belief of cultural distance and separateness.

3 Assuming the Legacy of Slavery: Brazil’s MFA

Countries with a history of slavery, such as the United States, Brazil as well as Colombia, are still confronted with ethnic inequalities of a strong degree. This section considers the implication of such a legacy on the recruitment of diplomats into Brazil’s MFA, the *Itamaraty*.

26 Behrens 2017.

27 Sofer 1997; Sharp 2009.

28 Sofer 1997, 179.

29 Interview, Councillor, French MFA, 28 September 2018 (telephone).

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### 3.1 *The Narrative*

In Brazil, the notion of ethnic diversity essentially revolves around the social integration of the descendants of black African slaves, called *Afrodescendentes*, which composed at least half of the population in 2019. Within the MFA, African Brazilian diplomats constituted less than 1 percent of the career staff when left-wing President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was elected in 2003, despite the narrative of a multiracial democracy conveyed in the official state ideology. Prior to 1972, there had been no minorities whatsoever: Brazil's MFA was uniformly white. It was in this context that President Jânio Quadros appointed in 1961 the first non-career black Ambassador, journalist Raimundo Sousa Dantas, to represent Brazil in Ghana. President Quadros felt that it would raise Brazil's credibility not only as a multiracial state, but also as a natural ally of postcolonial Africa. Ambassador Sousa Dantas had to struggle with his assignment; his deputy in Accra did not relinquish the official residence and staff dragged their feet, often forgetting to send back telegrams to Brasília.<sup>30</sup> Ambassador Sousa Dantas blamed this in part on established racism inside Brazil's diplomatic service.<sup>31</sup>

The nature of the entrance examination for the diplomatic service is the main explaining factor of the *Itamaraty's* resilient whiteness. The *Concurso de Admissão à Carreira de Diplomata* is one of Brazil's hardest public service examinations. It requires preparation in private institutes, which are expensive. This affects African Brazilian families, which are generally poorer than their white counterparts. Contrary to countries such as France, there have never been multiple paths in Brazil to enter diplomacy but a single entrance examination completed with training at the Brazilian Diplomatic Academy, the *Instituto Rio Branco*. Entrance has grown more competitive over time, as shown by the increase in the ages of entrants from 24 years old in 1970 to over 27 years old in 2010.<sup>32</sup> Competition is fierce, and most applicants do not pass on their first try.

In accordance with President Lula da Silva's platform of making hitherto insulated bureaucracies more representative of Brazil's overall population, a policy of moderate affirmative action was launched in 2003, in which equality of outcome was left unchanged with efforts concentrated on equality of opportunity. Scholarships were offered to self-identifying African Brazilians for the preparation of the *Itamaraty* entrance examination. The scholarship bore the costs of preparation in private institutes. The amount of the

<sup>30</sup> Dávila 2011.

<sup>31</sup> Sousa Dantas 1965.

<sup>32</sup> Interview, Brazilian MFA, 1 March 2018.

awards — 25,000 Brazilian reais (5,765 euros), increased to 30, 000 Brazilian reais (6,920 euros) in 2016 — closely matched costs of preparation. Scholarships were coupled with changes in the examination itself: Insufficient English scores ceased to be grounds for elimination, and the need to master French and Spanish was no longer as critical.<sup>33</sup> A second phase of affirmative action, based this time on difference of opportunity, was introduced in 2011 after the election of another left-wing President, Dilma Rousseff. A quota policy was established in the entrance examination of the *Itamaraty*, initially applying only to the first phase of the selection process to pre-empt internal resistance at perceived meddling in what was seen as a rite of passage among Brazilian diplomats. From a 10 percent first-phase quota in 2011, the policy expanded to a steady 20 percent quota across the entire examination process in 2014.<sup>34</sup>

But difficulties arose as a result of the implementation of quotas.<sup>35</sup> The subjective nature of African descent in a mixed society like Brazil effectively allows for applicants to register for the less-competitive quota spots (25 percent of the annual intake: five out of nineteen for 2018) by means of self-identification.<sup>36</sup> Due to the competitive nature of the selection process, there was a strong incentive for applicants to look for an easier way in, and some were eventually admitted despite looking white. The Brazilian MFA subsequently had to deal with African Brazilian non-governmental organisations alleging that white candidates had essentially stolen their minority spots. In response, the *Itamaraty* switched gears in the span of two years from self-identification to external determination. Shortly after the entry into force of the affirmative action law for the public service in 2014, the use of ad hoc commissions was rendered mandatory. These commissions judged applicants according to a public list of phenotypical criteria such as the shape of the nose or the lips.<sup>37</sup> Accusations of implementing a racial tribunal were immediately rife,<sup>38</sup> leading the *Itamaraty* to tackle the issue in subsequent editions of the entrance examination with a committee of 'heteroidentification' (*Comissão de heterointenificação*). The new system was offered a reprieve with a favourable decision in 2017 from Brazil's highest court, the Supremo Tribunal Federal, wherein the use of such criteria is deemed legitimate, provided that they 'respect human dignity and the right to due process'.<sup>39</sup> However, overriding subjective racial

33 *Folha de São Paulo* 2005.

34 CACD 2018.

35 Nassif 2010.

36 Ministério das Relações Exteriores 2018.

37 *Época* 2011.

38 Interview, Brazilian MFA, 1 March 2018.

39 Supremo Tribunal Federal 2017.

identities with purportedly scientific criteria only stresses the imprecise nature of ethnicity in Brazil.

Affirmative action procedures have produced modest results on the recruitment of African Brazilian diplomats. It allowed nineteen black applicants to enter the MFA from 2002-2012, raising the proportion of blacks within the *Itamaraty* from 0.65 percent (1997-2002) to 2.76 percent (2003-2010).<sup>40</sup> It was only at the end of Foreign Minister Celso Amorim's tenure, in 2010, that the first black Ambassador coming from the career rose through the ranks. Benedicto Fonseca Filho was chosen to head the Science and Technology Department inside the MFA, a relatively minor assignment. While arguably limited in its effects, affirmative action at the *Itamaraty* does open a window of change in a half-black country, which had no black diplomat before 2003.

### 3.2 Analysis

Two explanatory variables stand out to explain why ethnic diversity has become a concern for Brazil's MFAs.

- 1 The first variable is the role of domestic party politics. It was under the presidencies of left-wing leaders, Lula da Silva and Rousseff, that affirmative action plans were implemented inside the Brazilian MFA. As the candidates of the poorest groups among the population, which are mainly black, Lula da Silva and Rousseff decided to confront the consequences of slavery legacy on social inequalities. It is in this context that the rules of recruitment were changed at *Itamaraty*, which has historically been dominated by the white upper class. It reminds us that MFAs are constituent parts of the state and cannot leave their organisation life outside domestic politics.
- 2 The second variable concerns Brazil's strategic priorities in foreign policy. One policy choice after 2003 was developing more cooperative relationships with Africa, with the *Itamaraty* opening a series of new embassies in Africa. A foreign policy towards Africa would have problems of legitimacy if Brazil, where half of its inhabitants are black, cannot provide any African Brazilian diplomat in its embassies. In 2004, then Councillor Benedicto Fonseca Filho heard from African (and also Caribbean) diplomats at the United Nations that he was the first African Brazilian they had seen representing *Itamaraty*.<sup>41</sup> The change in the recruitment procedures had then to

<sup>40</sup> de Camargo Lima and Silva Nunes de Oliveira 2008.

<sup>41</sup> *Folha de São Paulo* 2011.

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be analysed not only regarding the domestic political context but also Brazil's foreign policy choices.

There are, however, limits to the promotion of ethnic diversity inside Brazil's MFA.

1 A first limit is the slow turnover inside the *Itamaraty*, with a compulsory retirement age of 70 years old. Kept at the same level, ethnic quotas can be expected to take 50 years to completely work their way through.

2 A second limit is again party politics. The policies of affirmative action for the recruitment of diplomats were introduced by left-wing presidents, whose party, the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* was clearly defeated in the 2018 presidential election. In 2019, the entrance exam to the diplomatic career continues to propose a quota of 20 percent for the African Brazilian candidates (four of twenty posts).<sup>42</sup> But debates go on in Brazil about the upholding by new right-wing populist President Jair Bolsonaro and his Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ernesto Araujo, of the quota system for the recruitment of the African Brazilian candidates, as their ideology is not inclined to support affirmative action. Therefore, in the future, will *Itamaraty* continue the efforts introduced under Lula da Silva's and Rousseff's administrations to diversify its ethnic composition?<sup>43</sup> This kind of question demonstrates how party politics is an important variable to be taken into consideration to analyse ethnic diversity inside MFAs.

4 Multiculturalism as State Policies: MFAs in India and Singapore

This section deals with a third case study concerning MFAs in countries where ethnic diversity is officially recognised by multicultural or multiracial states. The two countries chosen to illustrate this are India and Singapore.

4.1 The Narrative

India officially identifies six ethnic minorities on the basis of religious practice next to the majoritarian Hindus group. They are Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs, Parsees and Jains. Muslims comprise the largest minority group with 172 million inhabitants in 2011 (14. 2 percent of the population).

<sup>42</sup> Istituto Rio Branco 2019.

<sup>43</sup> Interview, scholar Gaspard Estrada, Paris, 3 July 2019.

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Indian politics is heavily influenced by the situation of a Muslim minority. The latter faces the legacy of the politics of hate and violence entrenched in India since the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 into India and Pakistan.<sup>44</sup> In Singapore, a city-state of 5.6 million inhabitants in 2017, and a sovereign state since 1965, the notion of ethnic diversity is officially recognised as 'race' following the British colonial practice and censuses. Race is stamped on citizens' birth certificates and national identity cards. It also affects political participation in national elections via Group Representation Constituencies.<sup>45</sup> Under the Constitution of Singapore, differences among the citizenry are simplified into three main racial groups plus one residual group: Chinese, Malays, Indians and Others.<sup>46</sup> The Others include Eurasian Singaporeans and everyone else. In 2017 Singaporeans classified as Chinese formed the largest ethnic group of the country, comprising 74.3 percent of the resident population while Malays comprised 13.3 percent and Indians 9.1 percent.

Recruitment procedures to access the diplomatic career differ widely in India and Singapore. With a total of only 900 officers working in Delhi headquarters and in embassies and consulates abroad in 2018, the Indian Foreign Service is a small administration compared to the size of the country.<sup>47</sup> The recruitment of Indian diplomats happens through a prestigious and competitive examination called the Indian Civil Service Examination conducted annually by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC). The UPSC recommends the candidates who are to be recruited for the Indian Administrative Services, the IFS and the Indian Police Services, the three topmost services. IFS got 32 new recruits in 2014, 45 in 2015, 45 in 2016.<sup>48</sup> Some Indian academic circles and think tanks regularly call for the necessity to recognise IFS as a specialised service and hold a separate competitive examination to recruit only foreign service officers.<sup>49</sup> The governments of India have never accepted such a change, but have opened up positions in the IFS for recruiting higher posts under a lateral entry method. The procedure has been subject to criticism from IFS officers who, as most career diplomats in the world, want to keep control on the access to higher posts. Contrary to India, there is no general exam in Singapore to become a diplomat.<sup>50</sup> Candidates apply to become foreign service officers and have the choice between two career tracks after they clear

44 Shaban 2016.

45 Elections Department Singapore 2017.

46 Chua 2003; Rocha 2011.

47 Levaillant 2016.

48 Department of Personnel and Training 2019a.

49 'Shashi Tharoor for IFS Test' 2017.

50 Rana 2009.

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admission tests: political and economic diplomacy or functional and corporate diplomacy. New officers then have to follow the Foreign Service Basic Program organised by the Diplomatic Academy of Singapore to learn basic diplomatic skills before starting their job at the MFA. According to their qualifications and per the MFA's needs, about 30 are recruited each year. The number seems high for the size of the country, but the attrition rate is also high. Many Singaporean diplomats leave the career after some years in office to go into the private sector for higher-paying jobs.

Affirmative action procedures exist in India to enter the public service while they do not in Singapore. In India the Constitution provides safeguards for the promotion of less-privileged groups inside the majoritarian Hindus group, on the basis of social, educational and geographical backwardness. The groups are the Scheduled Castes (SCs), the Scheduled Tribes (STs) and the Other Backward Classes (OBCs).<sup>51</sup> SCs are referred to as Untouchables (*Dalits* in Hindi), the lower castes from amongst the Hindus majoritarian group. STs are unprivileged due to geographical isolation (e.g., residence in hilly areas and forested areas). OBCs consist of those economically, socially and educationally backward groups who are not included in the SCs or STs group. For candidates belonging to any one of the three groups, the exam procedure provides a relaxation in the qualifying marks and a lowering of the standard of evaluation to enable entry into the public service. In 2016, out of 45 IFS officers selected through the UPSC, 26 belonged to the General Category, 12 were selected in OBCs, 6 in SCs and 1 in STs.<sup>52</sup> Statistics show at the same time that officers belonging to SCs, STs and OBCs are less well represented at the higher echelons of the IFS, particularly at the level of Ambassador and High Commissioner. Contrary to depressed social classes among the majoritarian Hindus group, religious minorities (considered as ethnic minorities in this study) do not enjoy relaxation or extra attempts to sit for the Civil Service Examination in India. Forms of affirmative action, however, have been introduced with efforts concentrated on the equality of opportunity. The Ministry of Minority Affairs offers financial support to about 200 candidates from religious minorities annually who are able to clear the first stage of the Indian Civil Service Examination. This scholarship scheme, called the Naya Udaan Scheme, is based on the population data of the religious minorities under the Census of India 2011. The distribution is as follows: 146 for Muslims, 24 for Christians, 16 for Sikhs, 7 for Buddhists, 6 for Jains and 1 for Parsees.<sup>53</sup> However, as data for

<sup>51</sup> Garg 2010.  
<sup>52</sup> Department of Personnel and Training 2019b.  
<sup>53</sup> Ministry of Minority Affairs 2019.



the years 2013 to 2016 show, the scheme has not been very successful at enlarging the recruitment pool.<sup>54</sup>

Muslim minority representation falls short of enough recruitment through competition, and its members who manage to reach high posts mostly do so as promoted candidates. Among the notable Ambassadors belonging to the Muslim community is Syed Akbaruddin, who is the Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations in 2019. In Singapore, the recruitment of diplomats inside the MFA does not consciously take into consideration the ethnic background of candidates. If the Singapore society places an emphasis on racial representation in daily social relationships, many Singaporeans also believe in the ideology of individual meritocracy and do not clamour for corrective measures based on ethnicity to enter the public service. Concretely, this meritocratic recruitment works in favour of Chinese and Indians, and against the Malays, because of a general disadvantage of the latter ethnic group in educational achievement, specifically in university graduation numbers. Of the 110 Ambassador and High Commissioner appointments made between 1965 and 1980, 72 bore Chinese names, 21 Indian names and only 7 Malay names.<sup>55</sup> Contrary to other segments in the Singapore public service, and especially the army, there have not been demonstrations or controversial public debates about discrimination of Malays in the MFA.<sup>56</sup> But Singapore is also a country where an authoritarian state knows how to suppress public debate on sensitive issues.

#### 4.2 *Analysis*

This article analyses the extent to which the issue of diversity is important in the diplomacy of both India and Singapore. The interest of this case study comes out of a radically different explanation of the strategic use of ethnic diversity by MFAs in the two Asian multicultural states.

- 1 Ethnic proximity is used as a strategic goal for diplomacy in India. It appears when we look at the appointment of Ambassadors. The Indian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, since the very first mission, has always been a Muslim diplomat.<sup>57</sup> In the United Arab Emirates, statistics suggest that out of the fourteen Ambassadors posted by India to date since 1973, four have been Indian Muslim diplomats.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Ministry of Minority Affairs 2006.

<sup>55</sup> National Heritage Board 2006.

<sup>56</sup> Yap 2012.

<sup>57</sup> Embassy of India to Saudi Arabia 2019.

<sup>58</sup> Embassy of India to UAE 2019.

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In 2018, Muslim Ambassadors were representing India in Muslim or partly Muslim states as Lebanon, Turkmenistan and Oman.<sup>59</sup> The choice to appoint Muslim Ambassadors in these countries was a rational attempt by the IFS to favour trust through ethnic proximity in the diplomacy with the host country.

2 Ethnic detachment is used as a strategic goal for diplomacy in Singapore. Singapore's High Commissioner to Malaysia is never Malay, but always from the Indian or Chinese community and the High Commissioner to India is usually from the Chinese community. Ethnic proximity would be considered as a point of contention in Singapore's diplomacy because of its specific relation with China. A veteran Singapore diplomat, Tommy Koh, explains that the majority of Singaporeans being ethnic Chinese not only is an asset but also a liability for the bilateral relations between Singapore and mainland China. It is a 'liability because it has given rise to unreasonable expectations on the part of China towards Singapore. Many friends in China mistakenly perceive Singapore as a Chinese nation'.<sup>60</sup> For Singapore's MFA, ethnic detachment supports the country's diplomacy of independence in a geopolitical context where China could use the argument of belonging to the same ethnic group as a resource to dominate its smaller neighbour.

The comparison of India and Singapore demonstrates that the different status of the states regarding the international system and the regional geopolitical context also explains the way (proximity or detachment) that ethnic diversity is used as a diplomatic resource by the MFAs in two multicultural states

5 Conclusion

The three case studies allowed the authors to select, for each of them, a series of explanatory variables to answer their research question: What explains the interest of MFAs in the world to manage ethnic diversity in the recruitment of the diplomats? This article now moves a step forward and draws five comparative conclusions from the case studies.

First, the three case studies demonstrate that the issue of ethnic diversity in the recruitment of diplomats has different historical legacies: mass

59 Levaillant 2016.  
60 Koh 2016.

immigration in France and Norway, slavery in Brazil and postcolonial multiculturalism in India and Singapore.

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Second, in all countries except one — Singapore — MFAs are prepared to consider that ethnic difference and discrimination in the societies must be corrected with direct or indirect forms of affirmative action in the recruitment of diplomats. National legal frameworks provide MFAs with different margins of manoeuvring to organise affirmative action in the recruitment of diplomats. In Brazil and India, the national legal frameworks allow the MFAs to organise explicit affirmative action programs. In France, with affirmative action on ethnic grounds being forbidden, the MFA can use only indirect policy instruments, such as introducing West African languages in the exam program, to attract more candidates with West African family backgrounds.

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Third, the concrete results of affirmative action remain limited in all the countries in terms of the number of diplomats recruited. In general, all MFAs are still dominated by a majoritarian ethnic group: white in Brazil, France and Norway; Hindus in India; ethnic Chinese in Singapore. But a dynamic of change about this has existed in all MFAs since the 2000s.

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Fourth, a series of explanatory variables emerge from the comparison of the different case studies to explain the relevance of ethnic diversity in MFAs. A first comparative explanatory variable is the growing necessity for MFAs to be in tune with domestic debates about diversity: on integration of migrants (France and Norway), on racial discrimination (Brazil), on religious discrimination (India). This is the proof that MFAs cannot behave as worlds of their own, escaping domestic political debates. The second comparative explanatory variable has to do with ethnic diversity becoming an international norm,<sup>61</sup> which has an influence on the making of diplomacy.<sup>62</sup> States perceive an interest in having the image of being respectful of this international norm of ethnic diversity. It primarily concerns MFAs because they are responsible for the making and diffusion of diplomacy. The third comparative explanatory variable concerns the conduct of foreign policy in specific regional contexts. Ethnic diversity is a resource used by MFAs to increase the legitimacy of their foreign policies in certain regions of the world, as having a Muslim Ambassador in Saudi Arabia for India or being represented by black diplomats in African countries for Brazil.

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Fifth, the comparison of case studies also leads to identifying common limits in the use of ethnic diversity by MFAs to conduct diplomacy. A first limit is the crucial role that 'estrangement' still plays in the practice of MFAs. French and

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Norwegian MFAs are reluctant to send diplomats to countries where they have family roots because they could be tempted to ‘go native’. Such a fear validates the still dominant belief inside MFAs that a ‘good’ diplomat remains somebody who cultivates a form of cultural distance vis-à-vis their host country. A second limit is the specific pursuit of foreign policy interests. If Singapore’s MFA uses ethnic detachment in the appointment of Ambassadors in the Asian region, it is because systematising the appointment of Chinese ethnic candidates could diminish the independence of Singapore as a diplomatic actor vis-à-vis mainland China.

This article is an invitation to continue further research on the relation between ethnic diversity and diplomacy. A number of questions raised in this study can be put on the research agenda. First, *multiculturalism* defined as the presence of, or support for the presence of several distinct ethnic groups within a society, has become a widespread phenomenon in the Global North as well as in the Global South. Foreign policy analysis scholars have produced a number of relevant studies on the impact of ethnicity (ethnic groups, diaspora movements) on foreign policy decisions.<sup>63</sup> It is now the turn of diplomatic studies to devote more work to the consequences of multiculturalism on diplomatic processes, in particular representation and negotiation. Second, it is in the interest of the states of the Global North to show that their bureaucracies respect the norm of ethnic diversity as they respect the norm of gender diversity.<sup>64</sup> MFAs are no exception in this evolution which raises, however, a question for research: Does this pressing need for diversity correspond to structural change towards more pluralism in the societies of the Global North or is it a cosmetic attempt on the surface to convince liberal elites that it is the case? Third, how do states of the Global South really assess the efforts towards ethnic diversity introduced in the diplomacies of the Global North? The outside perception of ethnic diversity in diplomacy is an understudied topic. Does ethnic diversity in the countries of the Global North increase the legitimacy of their diplomacy in the Global South, breaking with the perception of a neocolonial legacy but also a white-dominant international system?<sup>65</sup> Finally, the consequences on diplomacy of the contest of ethnic diversity by nationalist and supremacist leaders, in both the Global North and the Global South, must be researched in more depth. Does the election of such leaders make a difference in the operational modes of diplomacies, reinforcing the power of dominant groups to the detriment of minority groups in diplomatic processes? This research agenda, which

63 Shain 1994-1995; Hill 2007; Aggestam and Hill 2008.  
64 Aggestam and Towns 2018.  
65 Okoth Opondo 2010.

requires an 'evidence-based approach to integrate knowledge' on the practice of diversity at the individual, team and organisational levels, should be a new input to diplomatic studies and also to diversity studies.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Bendl et al. 2016, 6.

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