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Black Women Are Not a Side Note

An in-depth intersectional critical discourse analysis of Eurocentric/Western conceptions of feminism: the Vrouwenraad as a case study

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I solemnly declare that I have written the master's thesis entitled "Black Women Are Not a Side Note, an in-depth intersectional critical discourse analysis of Eurocentric/ Western conceptions of feminism: the Vrouwenraad as a case study" myself. I am aware of the rules on plagiarism and have therefore ensured that these have been applied in this master's thesis.

Brussels, 07/08/2023   Rita Rossana Afonso

Acknowledgements

Dear reader,

Writing my master's thesis came with a lot of turmoil, heartache, tears, doubts but after those heavy emotions came acceptance, truth, tears of joy and heartfelt gratitude.

This work would not have been possible if it weren't for the Black women and Black feminists, Black queer people and people who do not fit within binaries who did the fundamental work. I would like to thank my friends, my family, and the Black women scholars, Dr. Memory Mphaphuli and Dr. Moya Bailey, I reached out to for their support because it really does take a village. And I would like to say thank you to my supervisors for their thought-provoking insights, their time and feedback. Furthermore, I would like to thank myself for speaking out, for going against the grain, for carrying a history of ancestry and allowing it to consume me. I know I come from generations of people who fought for their liberation and freedom; from fighting away settlers who put a foot on their land, through migrating away from warzones, and entering a new country where we were patted on the back for doing low income jobs to being frowned upon whenever we wanted to reach for the stars. Although there is only one race (the human race), "understanding the fiction of race" does not erase the inequalities that come with it because "race is a lived experience, and therefore it is enormously consequential" (Bernardine Evaristo, 2021, p. 5).

Summary

Cette thèse plonge dans le discours du plan annuel du Conseil des femmes afin d'étudier le degré d'inclusion et de représentation des femmes noires. Elle utilise un cadre d'Analyse Critique du Discours (ACD) pour scruter la manière dont le Conseil des femmes aborde les questions liées au sexisme et au racisme, en mettant l'accent sur la manifestation concomitante des deux formes d'oppression vécue par les femmes noires, communément appelée "misogynoir". L'étude examine si le Conseil des femmes reconnaît l'interconnexion du sexisme et du racisme, permettant ainsi de prendre en compte les expériences vécues des femmes noires dans leurs discussions politiques.

Le féminisme en Flandre s'est historiquement concentré sur les questions de genre touchant principalement un groupe spécifique de femmes. Cette recherche vise à mettre en lumière la sous-représentation des femmes noires, en tenant compte de leurs expériences uniques à l'intersection de la race et du genre. Le Conseil des femmes, en tant qu'organisation de défense des droits, joue un rôle essentiel dans l'élaboration des politiques et l'influence sur les discussions sur l'égalité des sexes. L'analyse de leur discours de plan annuel est primordiale pour comprendre l'inclusivité et la portée de leur approche.

Grâce à une revue approfondie de la littérature, cette thèse fournit un contexte contextuel sur les mouvements féministes en Flandre et la sous-représentation historique des femmes noires dans le discours. Elle met en évidence la prévalence d'une approche à axe unique dans la recherche féministe, qui a tendance à négliger les expériences complexes et diversifiées des femmes de divers horizons raciaux et ethniques.

En utilisant l'ACD, l'étude révèle des lacunes significatives dans l'approche du Conseil des femmes pour aborder le sexisme et le racisme. Le discours révèle une compartimentalisation du sexisme et du racisme en catégories analytiques distinctes, omettant la nature simultanée et interconnectée de la misogynoir vécue par les femmes noires. Par conséquent, les expériences des femmes noires sont reléguées à la périphérie des discussions politiques, ce qui limite la compréhension des défis spécifiques auxquels elles sont confrontées.

Les résultats soulignent l'urgence de reconnaître et d'intégrer des perspectives intersectionnelles dans la planification politique du Conseil des femmes. En négligeant la nature simultanée du

sexisme et du racisme vécue par les femmes noires, le discours perpétue une vision étriquée des problématiques d'égalité des sexes. Le fait de ne pas reconnaître la misogynoir favorise l'exclusion et renforce la marginalisation des femmes noires dans le processus d'élaboration des politiques.

Cette thèse met en évidence l'importance de centrer les expériences des femmes noires dans le discours féministe et la planification politique. Elle plaide en faveur d'une approche plus inclusive et équitable qui reconnaît l'interconnexion de multiples formes d'oppression. Le Conseil des femmes doit adopter une perspective intersectionnelle plus large pour refléter les réalités diverses de toutes les femmes et veiller à ce que les politiques formulées soient véritablement représentatives et émancipatrices.

Pour remédier à cette sous-représentation, il est essentiel de s'efforcer d'amplifier les voix des femmes noires et de favoriser leur engagement significatif dans les expériences et les perspectives. À cette fin, la thèse propose des recommandations pratiques pour que le Conseil des femmes adopte une approche intersectionnelle dans son discours, sa formulation politique et sa structure organisationnelle. En impliquant activement les femmes noires dans les processus de prise de décision et les postes de direction, le Conseil des femmes peut créer un environnement plus inclusif et efficace pour promouvoir un programme féministe véritablement équitable.

En conclusion, cette thèse met en évidence la nécessité d'un changement de paradigme dans la planification politique féministe au sein du Conseil des femmes. En reconnaissant l'importance de la misogynoir vécue par les femmes noires, l'organisation peut ouvrir la voie vers une égalité des sexes plus inclusive qui englobe les réalités diverses de toutes les femmes. Seule une approche globale et intersectionnelle

This thesis delves into the discourse of the annual plan of the Vrouwenraad to investigate the extent of inclusion and representation of Black women. It employs a critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework to scrutinize how the Vrouwenraad addresses issues related to sexism and racism, with a particular focus on the concurrent manifestation of both forms of oppression experienced by Black women, commonly known as misogynoir. The study examines whether the Vrouwenraad acknowledges the interconnectedness of sexism and racism, thus accommodating the lived experiences of Black women within their policy discussions.

Feminism in Flanders has historically centered on gender issues predominantly affecting White women. This research aims to shed light on the underrepresentation of Black women, considering their unique experiences at the intersection of race and gender. The Vrouwenraad, as a prominent advocacy organization, plays a vital role in shaping policy and influencing gender equality discussions. Analyzing their annual plan discourse is pivotal in understanding the inclusivity and scope of their approach.

Through a comprehensive literature review, the thesis provides a contextual background on feminist movements in Flanders and the historical underrepresentation of Black women within the discourse. It highlights the prevalence of a single-axis approach in feminist research, which tends to overlook the complex and multifaceted experiences of women from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Employing CDA, the study uncovers significant gaps in the Vrouwenraad's approach to addressing sexism and racism. The discourse reveals a compartmentalization of sexism and racism into distinct analytical categories, omitting the simultaneous and interconnected nature of misogynoir experienced by Black women. Consequently, Black women's experiences are relegated to the periphery of policy discussions, resulting in a limited understanding of the unique challenges they face.

The findings highlight the urgency of recognizing and incorporating intersectional perspectives within the Vrouwenraad's policy planning. By neglecting the simultaneous nature of sexism and racism experienced by Black women, the discourse perpetuates a myopic view of gender equality issues. The failure to acknowledge misogynoir perpetuates exclusion and reinforces the marginalization of Black women from the policy-making process.

This thesis underscores the significance of centering Black women's experiences in feminist discourse and policy planning. It advocates for a more inclusive and equitable approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of multiple forms of oppression. The Vrouwenraad must embrace a broader intersectional lens to reflect the diverse realities of all women and ensure that the policies formulated are truly representative and empowering.

Addressing this underrepresentation requires concerted efforts to amplify the voices of Black women and promote meaningful engagement with their experiences and perspectives. To this end, the thesis proposes practical recommendations for the Vrouwenraad to adopt an intersectional approach in their discourse, policy formulation, and organizational structure. By actively involving Black women in decision-making processes and leadership positions, the Vrouwenraad can cultivate a more inclusive and effective feminist agenda.

In conclusion, this thesis highlights the need for a paradigm shift in feminist policy planning within the Vrouwenraad. By acknowledging the significance of misogynoir experienced by Black women, the organization can forge a more inclusive path towards gender equality that encompasses the diverse realities of all women. Only through a comprehensive and intersectional approach can the Vrouwenraad effectively address the challenges faced by Black women and pave the way for a truly equitable and empowered society.

Abstract

This master's thesis investigates the extent to which the discourse of the annual plan of the Vrouwenraad includes Black women. Employing a critical discourse analysis framework, this study explores how the Vrouwenraad addresses issues related to sexism and racism, particularly the simultaneous manifestation of both phenomena mainly experienced by Black women, known as misogynoir. The research reveals that the Vrouwenraad perceives sexism and racism as two separate analytical categories, neglecting the interconnectedness of these forms of oppression in the lived experiences of Black women. Consequently, the exclusion of misogynoir from the discourse hinders a comprehensive understanding of the unique challenges faced by Black women. The findings emphasize the importance of recognizing and incorporating intersectional perspectives to ensure more inclusive and equitable feminist policy planning.

Keywords: intersectionality, misogynoir, women's rights, critical discourse analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Introduction

Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988, p. 63) contends that, many US feminism and western European feminism document stories of power and oppression towards Black women and women of colour. She states that these feminist texts contain a "discursive homogenization" claiming that all women go through the same forms of patriarchy and thus share the same struggle. Historically, less emphasis has been placed on the significance of race in western European feminism, as well as the simultaneous dynamic of race and gender in gender studies and scientific research on feminist struggles (Winifred Breines, 2007; Avtar Brah & Ann Phoenix, 2014; bell hooks, 2015). Marginalized women across the US and Europe expressed that the particular struggles they were facing were not being addressed within western European feminism, they critiqued western European feminism for not being intersectional enough, leaving women of colour and Black women in the margins (Estelle B. Freedman, 2002; Sarah Bracke, 2005; Benita Roth, 2004). Although Flemish organizations address and are aware of the existence of racism, addressing the unique intersection of race and sexism – referred to as misogynoir – "is often still either absent or timidly emerging as a topic of discussion" or as a critical lens to evaluate mainstream feminism (Olivia Rutazibwa, 2018, p. 161).

Because academic accounts of feminism in western Europe have not taken race and gender simultaneously into account enough in their research, this study investigates to what extent the unique intersection of gender and race, focussing specifically on Black women from Sub-Saharan descent, discursively are considered in contemporary feminism in Flanders. In this study, we will examine the following research question: *To what extent does the discourse of the Vrouwenraad's annual plan consider the unique intersection of Black women?* We will employ a mix-method approach combining critical discourse analysis and intersectionality as a methodological framework to analyse the discourse of the Vrouwenraad's annual plan 2022.

In this study, we wish to emphasize the relationship between deeply rooted historical, social, and political structures. Therefore, this study does not focus on the grammatical or lexical dimension of language. Rather we focus on the social processes and social reality constructed by language, according to Michel Foucault (2002) we do not have to approach language in technical linguistic terms since language is the instrument through which we generate knowledge and thus language is present everywhere.

Chapter 2 of this study provides a theoretical framework where we cover the semantic difference between colonialism and coloniality, we then closely examine the relationship between colonialism, race, and gender. Moreover, in this chapter we dive deeper into the (dis)connection of feminism and race where we discuss race as a significant blind spot in mainstream feminist texts, we equally address the importance of intersectionality in feminist discourses and we shed light on why it is important to differentiate Black feminism from Afro-feminism. Furthermore, the phenomenon of intersectional invisibility will be explained and we close off this theoretical framework by providing a discursive examination of intersectional invisibility in modern-day Belgium. **Chapter 3** provides an in-depth overview of the methodological procedures in this study. In the methodological framework, we address the crucial importance of research positionality. We account for the research methods used, we opted for a mixed-method approach using intersectionality within critical discourse analysis as a research framework. We briefly addressed the history of the Vrouwenraad as an institution and for what it stands. This chapter also includes a careful dissection of the annual plan its different chapters and its aims followed by structuring the data according to a frame analysis. **Chapter 4** entails a critical discourse analysis applied to the three main ambitions listed within the annual plan. **Chapter 5** uses an African feminist and Black feminist perspective to critically analyse the Vrouwenraad as a feminist organization. **Chapter 6** gives an overall conclusion, closing this study off with **Chapter 7** where the limitations of this study will be discussed.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Understanding colonialism and coloniality

Walter D. Mignolo & Arturo Escobar (2013) point out that colonialism refers to the geographical and physical space in which a country exercises power and oppression over another country, thereby creating an empire. To give an example: Congo[1] was colonized by the Belgians. Coloniality, on the other hand, refers to the long-lasting patterns of power that resonate as a result of colonialism (Mignolo & Escobar, 2013, p. 97). Walter D. Mignolo and Arturo Escobar (2013, p. 97) report that:

> […] coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breath[e] coloniality all the time and everyday.

We can therefore deduce that coloniality outlasts colonialism and thus replaces it. However, coloniality is not merely the leftover effect of any particular type of colonial relationship (Mignolo & Escobar, 2013, p. 97) and it is certainly not a less effective tool for domination. On the contrary, it is still actively present – also in a cognitive sense (Sylvia Tamale, 2020, p. 28). The primary tool used to legitimize the colonization project of Africa by Euro-Americans was the invention of race (Boris Bertolt, 2018; Lisa Disch & Mary Hawkesworth, 2016; Aníbal Quijano 2007; Sylvia Tamale, 2020; Dounia Bourabain, 2022). Racial groups of people as they are today were created by Anglo-Americans as a political and economic tool to justify supremacy and the enslavement of non-White people (Tamale, 2020, p. 4).

2.1.1 Colonialism and race

According to Mignolo and Escobar (2013, p. 98), the construct of race is defined by a vertical classification of human races, suggesting that features of one's identity – such as "skin colour, hair texture, an individual's eyes and nose features", etc. (Tamale, 2020, p. 4-5) – represent biological superiority over others. This power dynamic has been conceptualized by Peruvian scholar Aníbal Quijano as the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2007, p. 111). The concept of

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[1] This example is referring to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

coloniality of power includes how much humanity is attributed to each race. For instance, a person's skin tone might reveal how close or how far away they are from being considered fully human, implying that the lighter one's skin tone, the closer to full humanity one is and the darker one's skin tone, the further from full humanity one is (Mignolo & Escobar, 2013, p. 13). However, phenotypical differences have more to do with ancestry and/or environmental variables than they do with biological structure (Tamale, 2020 p. 4-5).

Quijano developed this idea to highlight the dynamics of global power to demonstrate how non-Western , indigenous, and native knowledge systems are perceived as "local" and "subjective". In contrast to Eurocentric knowledge systems which are presented as "universal" and "objective" (Mignolo & Escobar, 2013; Bertolt, 2018; Tamale, 2020). Moreover, indigenous and native knowledge systems engage humans, nature and animals in horizontal arranged dynamics centring solidarity (Mignolo & Escobar, 2013; Bertolt, 2018; Tamale, 2020). As opposed to Eurocentric knowledge systems, these vertically arranged power dynamics, that have their roots in colonial conceptions of the world, suggest that some persons or ideas are regarded as superior over others (Mignolo & Escobar, 2013, p. 18). Nevertheless, this racialization process eventually led to racism, the idea that one group is superior to another (Michael Banton, 2015; Sarah Mayorga-Gallo, 2015; Bourabain, 2022). Nowadays, it has been established that race is an imperialist, capitalist, patriarchal, social construct that has been repeatedly refuted by science. Despite this fact, the social construct of race continues to have consequential impacts on marginalized people's lives (Bourabain 2022; David Goldberg, 2002; Stephen Gould, 1996).

2.1.2   Coloniality of power

The conceptualization of coloniality of power has embedded many power dynamics and hegemonic structures such as "the coloniality of being" this conceptualization calls into question the meaning of the term "human" elaborating on the colonizer's denial of humanity of the colonized based on skin tone and phenotypical differences (Nelson Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 257). In order to understand the concept of coloniality of power we should view these power dynamics as interconnected structural dynamics that support and maintain colonialism (Tamale, 2020, p. 29). Quijano's paradigm and the paradigm of intersectionality, that will be covered in chapter 2.4, are comparable in several ways because of the interrelated dynamics both paradigms contain (Tamale, 2020, p. 30).

Moreover, this concept of power is one of the main driving forces for modernity[2]. It does not only involve the subordination of Black[3] bodies (as we will see in paragraph 2.2.2); this subordination is also embedded in modern thought, which holds control over knowledge systems and subjectivity, which includes that the African perspective of knowledge whether it be about academic performances, art, history, gender, or sexuality are rearticulated as "inferior" or "lacking" by the West (Bertolt, 2018; Quijano 2007; Mignolo 1995; Mignolo, 2000; Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012). Bertolt (2018, p. 5) offers a critique of modernity stating that modernity places Europe and America at the epicentre of knowledge humiliating, undermining, and criminalizing non-Western knowledge systems and native peoples' lifestyles[4]. Western and European settlers captured not only their bodies but also, and perhaps more importantly, their minds and subconscious, deliberately erasing and devaluing native peoples' histories and ways of existing (Tamale, 2020, p. 30).

2.2 Understanding the emergence of the coloniality of gender in Africa

2.2.1 The impact of coloniality on our understanding of sex, sexuality and gender

Critical race scholars such as Tamale (2020), Bertolt (2018), Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí (1997), Iq Amadiume (1997), and others have emphasized the crucial importance of exposing many of the accepted traditions and assumptions that support the social institutions of sex, gender, and sexuality in Africa. In doing so, they challenge and problematize the normative ideologies regarding these concepts. According to Tamale (2020, p. 92) the personal experience of one's identity is strongly influenced by three interrelated key concepts, namely: sex, gender and sexuality. Tamale (2020, p. 92) describes this global occurrence as fundamental in one's development of their personal identity. Complex concepts such as sex, gender and sexuality are intrinsically linked and interwoven with one another. Tamale points out that when such concepts intersect with ideologies of "race, ethnicity, nationality, age and religion" they only

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[2] "The ideology that blends capitalist interests with colonialism and coloniality, under the wrong assumption that there is only one global way to pursue development" (Quijano in: Tamale, 2020, p. 6).

[3] We capitalize Black and White in this study to acknowledge the ideology of racialization and the manifestation of Whiteness within Belgium's society (Sara Trechter & Mary Bucholtz, 2001).

[4] e.g. "In particular, knowledges of women (e.g., alchemist wise women), of "peasants" and working classes, and of the "pagans" or earth-centred religion worshippers were all subjugated and criminalized" (Tamale, 2020, p. 29).

become considerably more compounded (Tamale, 2020, p. 92). While this is an important fact, the influence of coloniality on our thinking and understanding about sex, gender and sexuality has not been sufficiently acknowledged.

2.2.2 Coloniality and gender

It is important to take into consideration the fact that social hierarchy and geopolitics[5] are not just influenced by racial dynamics (Tamale, 2020 p. 5). Although many scholars agree that racial power dynamics are a social construct (Howard Winant, 2006; Bourabain, 2022) many allegedly fail to examine the gender component within these dynamics. Quijano's model of coloniality of power is criticized by postcolonial researcher María Lugones (2010) for failing to incorporate the gender element into the hierarchical systems it addresses. She described the concept of gender coloniality, which allows us to understand that "gender is a mechanism for colonial domination over non-White racialized bodies" (Tamale, 2020, p. 114). Lugones (2010) argues that the social construction of race was simultaneously a reinvention of the social construction of gender and thus race inequalities and gender inequalities are intrinsically linked. We can therefore claim that race is gendered and gender is racialized.

According to critical race theory, gender coloniality has led to the formation of White women as an antithesis to White males and White bourgeois men as the ideal human representation (Lugones, 2007). White women were subjugated to White man and White women were deemed superior to Black men and Black women (Bertolt, 2018, p.8) who were viewed as "degenerated beings" close to animals (Tamale, 2020, p. 5). This subordination also meant that Black women and men had no agency over their own bodies: racialized bodies were negotiable under colonial practices such as sexual violence, exploitation and treating those bodies as merchandise (Mendoza in: Disch & Hawkesworth, 2018). For example, indigenous[6] and native women were treated as "instrumental vehicle[s] for the reproduction of race and capital" (Xhercis Mendez, 2015, p. 45) under the colonial/modern gender regime. In short, the goal of racialization and

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[5] "A study of the influence of such factors as geography, economics, and demography on the politics and especially the foreign policy of a state" Definition of geopolitics. (n.d.). In *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. Retrieved from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/geopolitics

[6] "Indigenous Peoples are distinct social and cultural groups that share collective ancestral ties to the lands and natural resources where they live, occupy or from which they have been displaced." Indigenous Peoples. (n.d.). World Bank. Retrieved from https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/indigenouspeoples

gender oppression is to maintain and exercise dominance and influence (Quijano, 2007, p.112-113). Therefore, when analysing social constructs such as race, we must also consider the gendered factor and vice versa.

2.2.3 The imposition of a Western gender regime in Nigeria

African society underwent a continental shift during colonization in the 1800s, which led to the introduction of different political systems that promoted inequality. This new regime permeated all layers of society such as education, social norms (what is deemed acceptable or unacceptable), politics, economy, and religion – based on Christianity[7] (Tamale, 2020, p. 6). Western articulations and ideologies of gender hierarchies, which had not previously been known in Africa, were imposed by Christian missionaries (Gloria Wekker, 2016, p. 144-145). For instance, under indirect British administration rule in Nigeria, female chiefs were eliminated and stripped of their positions of authority, but male chiefs could keep their positions (Tamale, 2020, p. 6).

Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí (1997) studied the social category of "woman" and explains in her book *The Invention of Women*, how and why the concept of gender hierarchy emerged in African societies focusing specifically on Yorùbá[8] land. She emphasizes on the West's contribution and influence on the implementation of this gender regime throughout her book. This is due to two factors: first, the fact that most African cultures were ruled by European nations, and second, the West's continued dominance in the field of knowledge production systems (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p. x). Oyěwùmí (1997, p. 31) argues that gender-binarism is a social construct coming from the West and imposed on African societies. For this purpose, she takes Nigeria as a case study and shows that the Yorùbá society before colonization was not ordered according to the male-female categories. Instead, the basic feature of order within that society was age (Rubin in: Oyěwùmí, 1997, p. 31). Oyěwùmí claims that, long before Yorùbá society met the West,

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[7] Prior to the arrival of European invaders, certain African cultures acknowledged and recorded same-sex relationships (Hoad Neville, 2007, p. 35-48). According to Tamale (2020, p. 102) marriages in Africa were "usually undertaken for reproductive, economical, and diplomatic reasons,". She makes the observation that there are over 30 African societies where female weddings have been documented. All of this changed when Christianity was introduced to the continent, which proclaimed that only legitimate or official families should consist of one man and one woman (Tamale, 2020, p. 102).

[8] The Yorùbá people of Nigeria have a homeland and cultural region known as Yorùbá land (Trager, 2001)

the gendered (in anatomic and biological terms) category and concept of "woman" did not exist in the Yorùbá community (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p. ix). Furthermore, the physical body of an individual was not a criterion that was considered in the social hierarchy of Yorùbá society. The biological, physical and anatomical differences between men and women were not taken into account for ranking. In short, gender was not a determining factor for one's position or role in society (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p. xii-xiii).

2.2.3.1 The Western gender regime and the consequences for Sub-Saharan women

According to Oyěwùmí, the colonial sphere recognised four categories within society ranging from the privileged to the least privileged: "European men, European women, native men (African men), and the Other (African women)" (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p. 122). She mentions that, "Native Black women occupied the remaining and unspecified category of the Other" (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p. 122). The absence of that category's specification is conveniently and intentionally left unacknowledged and served as a signal that the group in question was not at all a part of society, as all the other categories were. The colonial process of creating a category of "woman" purely based on biological, physical and anatomical characteristics was and is used as a fundamental exclusionary mechanism. According to the gender paradigm this exclusion based on anatomy and biology makes women unsuitable for leadership positions in society and, as a result, submissive (Lugones, 2007, p. 184). This biological exclusion was new to Yorùbá society as their native language was gender neutral and there was thus no distinction made between male and female. Oyěwùmí (1997, p. 124) indicates that for Black women, "colonisation was a dual process of racial inferiority and gender subordination". The removal of women from state structures was, as it were, a mutilation for the Yorùbá society (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p. 125). The original nature of many African societies including in Nigeria, Angola but also Rwanda had female leaders – matriarchal tribes (Amadiume, 1997, p. 74; Bertolt, 2018, p. 11). The inherent nature of patriarchal Western culture was now established in Africa and for Sub-Saharan women this meant that they experienced a triple[9] oppression as a result of being thrown to the bottom barrel of a terrible history that was not theirs in the first place (Bertolt, 2018, p. 9). Although European women were reduced to "women" by their Western culture

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[9] By "triple oppression," we imply that White men, White women and black men all exercised power over Sub-Saharan women in a way, whether it be through racism, sexism, or both (Bertolt, 2018, p. 9).

(Oyěwùmí, 1997, p. 127) and oppressed[10] as well by White men – and to some extent they still are – yet they were nevertheless elevated above Black women due to their race – the fact that they were White (Bertolt, 2018, p. 8). Sub-Saharan women were forced into the category of "the Other"[11], losing their identity and right to exist in the Western gender regime, which neither recognized nor acknowledged them, and therefore they became invisible in society both in the West and in Africa (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p. 153). However, Bertolt (2018, p. 13) makes an important observation and points out that although Oyěwùmí's work gives us great inside into Yorùbá society before the European settlers came, her work cannot be extended to the entire African continent where the cultural realities are very diverse even within the Yorùbá community. Additionally, Rita Segato (2001) admits that patriarchal systems existed before European colonization. However, they were not as oppressive as the patriarchal systems imposed by European settlers as we know them today and in that respect she mainly agrees with Oyěwùmí. Moreover, even though the gender framework originated in the West, various theories for the binary gender category can be discovered within the West in the 18th century during the Age of Enlightenment, as well as diverse approaches to gender before that. Joan Wallach Scott (1996) attributes the separation of man and woman to the Enlightenment; at this period patriarchy and sexism were prevalent but much more differentiated. The power dynamics between the two categories then were first articulated during the Enlightenment. Whereas men and women were regarded to be fundamentally distinct entities, only men were thought to be logical and rational beings. As a result, only men were allowed to have political rights such as the right to vote (Scott, 1996, p. 10).

2.2.3.2 The polarizing nature of dichotomies

Oyěwùmí describes gender discourse as follows: "Gender as a dichotomous discourse is about two binarily opposed and hierarchical social categories - men and women" (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p. 32). In this construction, two categories were created – "man" and "woman", and at the same time a hierarchy emerged at the same time whereby men were seen as "the head or leader and women as subordinate or submissive" (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p. 31). As a result, "man" inherently stands for privilege while "woman" inherently stands for subordination. According to Lila Abdu-Lughod (1998, p. 7), modernity was associated with Western gender concepts, and the

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[10] e.g. not having the right to vote solely for the fact that they were women

[11] The category of "the Other" is further explained in chapter 2.3.1

absence of those binaries was considered primitive. The language of these dichotomies was intended to create a division between the West and non-West, implying that "The West was advanced, but the East was not" (Abdu-Lughod, 1998, p. 7). In order to support imperialism notions of modernity were essential in the formation of dichotomies.

Moreover, Serge Tcherkézoff warns that "an analysis that starts from a male/female pairing simply produces further dichotomies" (Tcherkézoff, 1989, p. 55). The binary gender system has only set about producing more dichotomies; the result is an infinite number of dichotomies that are inherently polarizing, such as: "heterosexual/homosexual, male/female, femininity/masculinity, White/black, civilized/uncivilised, modern/traditional, coloniser/colonised" (Tamale, 2020, p. 126). The Western gender framework reshaped gender fluidity and complexities into a dichotomy, implementing a two-part sex binary system creating inequality and inequity that encourages and reinforces exclusion and stigmatisation mechanisms and structures.

2.3 Feminism and race

2.3.1 Black feminist epistemology

The inability to identify race as a cornerstone to analyse women's oppression within discourse analysis has long been a painful blind spot in Western traditional feminist theory (Mohanty in: Bertolt, 2018, p. 8). Gail Lewis (2013, p. 886) analyses why gender experts in European settings might not include racial components or elements in their scientific research. Lewis (2013) contends that political discourses about race are regarded as a "foreign" problem from another period or place, which may explain why gender experts underestimate the relevance of race and racism in their analyses of gendered oppressive mechanisms. According to Plateau, "no Belgian feminist text from the 1970s and 1980s has rhetoric discussing oppression based on ethnic and cultural background of migrant women" (Plateau in: Nouria Ouali, 2015, p.18). In North America, Black women and women of colour critiqued mainstream feminism for only considering the oppression and experiences of "upper and middle-class heterosexual White women"; marginalised women demanded a feminism that considered factors such as class, race, (dis)ability, and sexual orientation (Bourabain 2020, p. 52). Not only mainstream feminism was critiqued between the 1970s and 1980s, several other social justice movements such as anti-racist, civil rights as well as other equal rights movements faced some criticism from women

of colour and Black women for not being inclusive enough (Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, 1992).

Black feminist epistemology[12] can be divided into three key elements. The first element is self-definition: this element includes validating oneself. The second one involves examining intersections and the last one involves lived experiences (Bourabain, 2022, p. 53). By gathering knowledge about what it means to be a Black woman in North America (or elsewhere), Black women scholars create self-definitions which are crucial in order to break stereotypes and (un)conscious biased discourses regarding Black women. Akwugo Emejulu and Francesca Sobande (2019, p. 3) describe Black feminism in the following terms:

> [...] a praxis that identifies women racialised as Black as knowing agents for social change. Black feminism is both a theory and a politics of affirmation and liberation. Black feminism names and valorises the knowledge production and lived experiences of different Black women derived from our class, gender identity, legal status and sexuality [...]

They explain that Black feminism is an act of liberation within a political framework. Black feminism is not only about the challenges they face but also about reclaiming their humanity in such a creative way that a gateway to a new world and new ways of living are possible (Emejulu & Sobande 2019, p. 3). They reject the White hegemonic rhetoric and false beliefs that Black women are "irrelevant" and "invisible" objects making them the "alienated Other" (Emejulu & Sobande 2019, p. 3; Patricia Hill Collins, 1989, p. 750).

Collins (2000) states that "the Other" refers to someone who is "other than". Being the "Other", however calls for comparison to a certain group (Bourabain, 2022, p. 53). Collins (2000) reveals that research conducted by White academics are often perceived as "objective" and free of

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[12] Epistemology is the study of the standards used to evaluate knowledge, "it investigates the standards used to assess knowledge or *why* we believe what we believe to be true" (Patricia Hill Collins, 2000, p. 328). Epistemology examines how power dynamics determine who is believed and why (Collins, 2000, p. 328). Black feminist epistemology critically examines and theorizes the marginalized position of Black women in society including race, gender, social class, and more. Within Black feminist epistemology Black women are "agents of knowledge" (Collins, 2000, p. 331). Their examination of Black women's position is intersectional unlike other social justice movements (Collins, 2000).

prejudice. However, studies conducted on Black women by White academics often put Black women in a position of being "the Other" generating biased rhetoric and stereotyped images which Collins (1991, p. 266) refers to as "controlling images". Those "objective" studies carried out by White academics create positive images of White men and in return negative images of Black women (Bourabain, 2022, p. 53). In order to combat these unfair and derogatory perceptions, it is crucial that Black women carry out research in their own community. In that way, Black women scholars and intellectuals are able to reclaim the narrative about Black women, through lived experiences and through the use of dialogue they create self-definitions and valuations of self (Collins, 1986, p. 18).

The discourse on Black feminist literature serves as a potent reminder that Black women have long battled to confront and destroy oppressive systems based on gender, class, race, and (dis)ability. Black women have successfully used their diverse experiences, backgrounds and knowledge to fight for women's rights (Collins, 2000). Black feminism elevates the voices and experiences of Black women from the margins to the centre of identity, allowing for the formation of new kinds of critical thinking, solidarity, and empowering ways to combat the hetero-normative patriarchal capitalistic ways in society (bell hooks, 2015). In contrast to popular belief, Black feminism is not a counterfeminism to White feminism "but rather a radical praxis for the liberation of everyone – starting with Black women" (Emejulu & Sobande, 2019, p. 4) "without privileging those experiences" (Collins, 2000, p. 228). Bourabain (2022, p. 54) highlights that "the aim is to learn from the unique positioning of Black women to further apply similar theories to other ethnic minoritised groups. Scholars can introduce a global transnational dimension to examine the differences but more importantly the similarities between the black feminist movement in the US and women of African descent in other countries".

2.3.2   Afro-feminism

Even though Bourabain (2022, p. 54) notes that academics can learn from the parallels and differences between Black feminists' experiences in the United States and Europe, Emejulu and Sobande (2019, p. 5-6) warn against blindly adopting American Black feminist theory and applying it in a European context. A crucial distinction to establish is that, despite their numerous similarities, Black feminism and Afro feminism in Europe are distinct movements. US Black feminist philosophy is frequently examined and haphazardly implemented in the

European environment, which Emejulu and Sobande (p. 5-6) believe is a severe mistake for two reasons.

Firstly, by baselessly transferring American Black feminist politics to Europe, the discourse around race and racialization is seen as an American narrative and therefore the social construct of race and its consequences of systemic racism and structural inequality are viewed as something that is not present in Europe, thus invalidating the experiences of Black feminists and feminists of colour in Europe and marginalizing the voices of this group. If racism is only understood through American influences/terms or in an American context, the necessity for racism to be addressed in Europe vanishes. Secondly, another effect of importing Black American feminist politics is that the history and experiences of European Black feminists combating racism and sexism are overshadowed by American Black feminists' narratives and experiences to the point where European Black feminists' dialogues and history are erased (Emejulu & Sobande, 2019, p. 5-6). Afro-feminism in Europe refers to the lengthy battle of Black feminists across many European empires who have been fighting against imperialism, colonialism, and enslavement. As previously stated, there are many similarities between Black feminism and Afro-feminism in Europe, however Afro-feminism in Europe focuses more on examining narratives of colonialism, racialization, and gender hierarchy in European nation-states (countries in Europe and the British Empire historically linked to the colonial past) in which Black women are part of society (Emejulu & Sobande, 2019, p. 5-6).

It is important to bear in mind that North American Black feminists influenced the theories of European Black feminists. Furthermore, it was found that there were some similarities between many of their researches and findings (Emejulu & Sobande, 2019, p. 5-6). Nevertheless, as already mentioned above, it is still important to acknowledge that we must make a conscious distinction in their experiences which are influenced by the context wherein they live. This is not to imply that they cannot draw on each other's theories; on the contrary. However, when approaching these theories, we must consider the context and the history which impacts both of their lived experiences differently (Emejulu & Sobande, 2019, p. 5-6).

2.4   Intersectionality

The term intersectionality refers to the simultaneous layers of oppression based on a person's multiple identities (Tamale, 2020, p. 65). Legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) coined the term intersectionality and introduced it to the academic sphere. Crenshaw believes that people's experiences of discrimination based on identities such as race and gender are not mutually exclusive, so analyses of their unique experiences should be intersectional as well. Her concept of "intersectionality" came to fruition when she was writing her paper "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" (Crenshaw, 1989). Using her paradigm of intersectionality in her paper, Crenshaw examines three cases of Black women who filed a discrimination lawsuit against a corporate company. She reveals how the legal system fails to protect Black women against sex discrimination and racism because of the single-axes approach. The legal system's antidiscrimination laws only protect Black women from racism from the point of view of Black men and they only protect Black women from sexism from the point of view of White women (Anna Carastathis, 2014, p. 306). Legally speaking, in these cases Black women could only face discrimination as either black *or* female and not as black *and* female; only one part of their identities is taken into account but the reality is that their identities of being black *and* female are intrinsically linked to one another. Crenshaw establishes in her paper that the legal system's approach is a single-axis approach lacking intersectionality.

Due to its widespread use across many fields and professions, the term "intersectionality" can be easily taken out of its intended context, which could result in a flattening of both the practice and the term's definition. Intersectionality is described as "flattening" when it is used as a catchphrase and loses its actual meaning (Alexander-Floyd, 2012). One of the main problems with the way intersectionality is used today is that many academics who study racial and sex discrimination separately ignore the term's original meaning and intent (Alexander-Floyd, 2012). Scholars frequently stray so far away from the original context that intersectionality tends to be reduced to identity politics (Sumi Cho, et al., 2013; Alexander-Floyd, 2012). According to Bourabain (2022, p. 57), "Intersectionality as many other theories is forced to adapt to disciplinary boundaries in which it appears, resulting in an amalgam of definitions." As a result, the concept of intersectionality has been watered-down, which may result in a false representation of Black feminist thought.

2.4.1 Intersectionality: the original point of view

Before Crenshaw (1989) introduced her paradigm of intersectionality to the academic sphere, a semantic frame about the intersections between race, class and gender had already been articulated by several women of colour and Black feminists such as Sojourner Truth and the Combahee River Collective (1977). It is impossible to enable change or equality, let alone equity if we cannot articulate or understand what intersectionality actually means. Therefore, it is crucial to retrace the initial concept of intersectionality and utilize intersectionality in the appropriate context or in the way it was intended to be used (Miki Kendall, 2020, p. 11). As mentioned above, Crenshaw (1989), a Black feminist, coined the term to fill a legislative gap in the US legal system which failed to acknowledge the intersections between race and gender – more specifically the identities of being Black and being a woman. Crenshaw identified this gap as a single-axis approach. A point of criticism towards Crenshaw's intersectionality paradigm is that intersectionality is more concerned about someone's identity rather than the systems that enable those identities to experience oppression (Jennifer Nash, 2008). As Crenshaw (1989) first described it, intersectionality should be understood as systems of inequalities that are inextricably linked to one another rather than as parts of a person's identities that are piled on top of one another. The intersectionality paradigm's purpose is to recognize that not everyone has the same experience and to remember that liberation and social justice are never "single-issue struggles since we do not live single-issue lives" (Audre Lorde, 1984, p. 183). If we consider intersectionality to be an additive model the focus will be shifted away from the systems that create inequality to the identities of people, giving a false impression that intersectionality is more concerned about someone's identity rather than the systems that enable those identities to experience oppression (Mary Maxfield, 2021; Helma Lutz, 2015). By employing intersectionality as an additive model, in which various forms of oppression are stacked on top of one another, we are ranking various experiences to determine who is oppressed the most. It is impossible to determine whether a disabled Asian woman is more oppressed than a Black lesbian immigrant. The concept of intersectionality does not concern how privileges or oppressions are layered on top of each other (Maxfield, 2021, p. 2)[13].

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[13] In commemoration of the eight Asian women who were killed in Atlanta on March 16 of 2021, academic Mary Maxfield wrote an opinion piece on intersectionality. She begged with readers to include the names of the women if they were going to use her opinion piece so that they would not be forgotten. And to keep in mind that sexism that targeted Asian women in particular was the driving force for the attack on these eight Asian women. The victims were identified as follows: Yong Ae Yue, Soon Chung Park, Paul Andre Michels, Hyun Jung Grant, Xiaojie Tan, Delaina Ashley Yaun, Daoyou Feng, Suncha Kim (Maxfield, 2021, p. 1)

Rather than asking who has the most difficulties, we should ask what our difficulties are. Intersectionality is about what our struggles are based on and who we are as individuals inside specific structures, environments, and inequity systems, such as patriarchy, heteronormativity, sexism, racism, classism, ableism, fat phobia, texturism, colourism etc. (Kendall, 2020). The rhetoric around intersectionality should be focused on the struggles or forms of oppression within the environment in which these forms of oppression are so intertwined that it renders it impossible to tell them apart (Crenshaw, 1989; Kendall, 2020; Ruby Hamad, 2020; Maxfield, 2021). To put it differently, intersectionality deals with the simultaneous experience of various forms of oppressions in a way that renders them inseparable from one another. Crenshaw (1989, p. 149) illustrates this with an intersection in traffic, in the midst of the intersection of Sainctelette and Yser it is impossible to tell if you are on Sainctelette or on Yser. According to Crenshaw (1989, p. 149), racism and sexism are experienced by Black women in a similar way, which makes it difficult to distinguish where one form of oppression ends and the other starts. Sexism alters the shape of racism, and racism alters the shape of sexism and what is left is a "particularly racialized form of misogyny and a particularly misogynistic form of racism that targets Black women specifically" (Maxfield, 2021, p. 2) which is known as misogynoir[14].

Research has shown that stereotypes of women vary depending on their race: White women, Black women and Asian women are all stereotyped differently because in the manner they were racialized (Crenshaw, 1991; Kendall, 2020, p. 57-59). When studying topics such as women's rights, feminism, and sexism in predominately White institutions such as universities, we observe that women were - and in some cases still are - thought to be weak and fragile, defenceless, and in need of protection. Gender studies in Europe also teach that women had to stay home and only do domestic work. (Kendall, 2020, p. 52-53; Maxfield, 2021). However, a detailed examination of the history of women's rights from a global perspective reveals that these stereotypes only hold true for White women. When we take a closer look at how sexism impacts Black women we come across a variety of stereotypes: the angry Black woman, the

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[14] The term was originally coined in 2008 by professor Moya Bailey to describe the marginalization of Black women in American media. Over time, the term misogynoir has become an expression to describe a global phenomenon - the marginalization of Black women - in television, film, social media and other communication channels (Moya Bailey, 2021, p. 1).

strong Black woman[15], the Jezebel[16], the Mammy[17] (Taylor Geyton et al., 2020; Dwight Brooks & Lisa Hébert, 2006, p. 299; Miki Kendall, 2020). Which are in conflict with stereotypes relating to White women. Due to the racialisation process sexism manifests and operates differently for Black women, women of colour, and White women. The goal is not to determine which incident of sexism is worse, the goal is to research, analyse, and comprehend how sexism affects different communities of women so that we can demand equitable justice for all women.

Kendall (2020, p. 60) reminds us that when narratives about sexism are only accepted, and supported based on articulated stereotypes linked to White women while leaving Black women's and marginalised women's stories and experiences in the margin, "Ignoring the treatment of the most marginalized women doesn't set a standard that can protect any women […]." A modern-day example of leaving Black women's and marginalised women's stories in the margin is the #MeToo Movement. Tarana Burke, a Black woman activist, started the movement in 2006 with the intention to help sexual assault victims to raise awareness, and especially to amplify the voices and stories of women from her community (Burke, 2021). The phrase "me too" was not getting the same recognition and attention until Alyssa Milano, a White American Hollywood actress, tweeted out the hashtag #MeToo encouraging everyone that had experienced sexual assault or intimidation to share their stories using #MeToo (Burke, 2021). The hashtag went viral and mainstream media started appropriating the hashtag without knowing the original purpose of the movement. This created an online environment where not only the mainstream media but also celebrities such as Milano were centring themselves in a conversation against sexual harassment, without acknowledging their privilege and the true purpose of the movement, which was originally started to amplify Black girls and women's voices (RoSa vzw, 2022). In October 2021 Burke tweeted: "Seeing "me too", the phrase I had built that work and purpose around, used by people outside that community, was jarring."[18]

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[15] The strong Black women stereotype embodies this false image that Black women are physically and mentally abnormally strong. This myth was made up to justify the abuse African women faced by Western slave traders. Black women are still affected by this archetype today (Taylor Geyton et al., 2020).

[16] The Jezebel stereotype embodies this hypersexualized image of Black women only wanting to have sex with White men for their own selfish interests (Dwight Brooks & Lisa Hébert, 2006, p. 299).

[17] The Mammy portrays a non-attractive Black nanny deprived of any sexual feelings and thoughts (Dwight Brooks & Lisa Hébert, 2006, p. 299).

[18] Burke, T. (2021b, October). *Tweet*. Twitter. Retrieved March 12, 2023, from https://twitter.com/TaranaBurke/status/1449057414255370245

Burke's greatest fear became true, her name was not tied to the hashtag and the original idea of her work, which was to amplify marginalised women's voices and stories, faded into the background (Burke, 2021a). It was pointed out to Milano that she should give recognition to the founder of the movement – Burke. However, the mainstream public still often do not tie the hashtag to Burke or its purpose and that for two reasons. Firstly, because of the way they have come into contact with the hashtag through the mainstream media, which in the beginning of the movement mainly focused on the well-known White Hollywood actresses. And secondly, the present proliferation of the movement in mainstream news which focuses mainly on (unknown) White women, recentering White women's narratives. The focus of the movement shifted from amplifying Black women and marginalized women's stories and voices to putting White women's stories in Hollywood and elsewhere at the centre of the movement. Burke herself states that "The women of color, trans women, queer people—our stories get pushed aside and our pain is never prioritized" (Burke, 2021a, p. 2). Once again, White women's narratives were put in the centre overshadowing and pushing the experiences and stories of marginalised women to the margin.

2.4.2   Intersectional invisibility

Stewart M. Coles and Josh Pasek (2020, p. 1) point out that the conceptualization of intersectional invisibility provides a semantic and analytical framework to understand how Black women, who are at "the intersection of racism and sexism, may be harmed when their unique experiences as Black women are not recognized" (Coles & Pasek, 2020, p. 1). In their research, they examine how movements for social justice such as feminism and anti-racism implement a single-axis approach by focusing exclusively on gender or race, leaving Black women's experiences in the margin. Coles & Pasek (2020, p. 2) further explain that "intersectional invisibility occurs within social categories because the social prototype of a woman is a White woman and the social prototype of a Black person is a Black man". Often in public discourses people fail to distinguish Black women from Black men when discussing experiences related to racism or Blackness portraying a false image that Black men and Black women endure racism in the same way. Due to the lack of distinction between Black women and Black men, Black women are masculinized and excluded from the societal category

"women". This may be the cause of the focus on White women in discourses about sexism and the focalisation on Black men in discussions about racism.

Furthermore, major feminist and anti-racist movements have been criticized for failing Black women's concerns, by only focusing on one single specific axis thereby excluding and rendering Black women's experiences invisible (Patrick Grzanka, 2019). To involve Black women's experiences and needs in social justice movements it is important to understand that Black women's experiences of discrimination based on race and gender are not similar nor equivalent to those of White women or Black men (Coles & Pasek, 2020, p. 2). When women's rights movements focus solely on gender without considering race simultaneously, Black women are at risk of being harmed. This is also true for anti-racist movements (Coles & Pasek, 2020, p. 2).

Moreover, bell hooks[19] (1981, p. 3-4) explains that Black women's experiences, challenges, and hardships have traditionally been marginalized in equal rights efforts. Supporting Black males in the civil rights struggle would imply conforming to patriarchal sexist role patterns that would deny them political voice. Supporting women's suffrage would imply that Black women were siding with White women activists who had publicly admitted to racism (hooks, 1981, p. 3-4; Gloria Hull et al., 1982). Racist and sexist ideas in society had conditioned them to deny their femininity and regard race as the sole meaningful label of identification (hooks, 1981, p. 1). Black women at the time claimed that the reality of sexism was nothing compared to the lethal reality of racist oppression, out of fear of accepting that sexism could be just as oppressive. They believed that "liberation from racial oppression" was all that was needed to gain ultimate freedom (hooks, 1981, p. 1-2). However, Sojourner Truth, a former Black female slave born in 1797, recognized that Black women faced a unique challenge both combined by sexism rooted in misogyny and racism rooted in anti-blackness. Truth underlined the female aspect of Black women's identity; when White women demanded the right to vote she asked White feminists: *what exactly makes a woman a woman?* In her speech, Truth demanded the right to vote for all women (hooks, 1981). This event highlights the point that White women used race to establish a division between women that are deserving of equality and women that

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[19] Gloria Jean Watkins honoured her mother and great-grandmother by choosing the pen name bell hooks. To draw attention to her work rather than her name, her ideas, and her personality she made the decision to not capitalize her new name "bell hooks" (Quintana, 2010).

are less or not deserving at all (hooks, 2015, p. 110). This exclusion of Black women is not only at the root of American feminism, but it also transcends borders and ultimately shapes feminist movements globally including Europe – Belgium, which results in centring White women's experiences in mainstream feminism which still happens to some degree (Bracke, 2005, p. 115-120; Kendall, 2020).

2.5   Colonial women in the women's movement in Belgium

Stijn Heyvaert (2015, p. 291) examined the discourse of Belgian feminists through a discourse analysis applied to five feminist journals[20] published between the period of 1892-1960. This time demarcation was deliberately chosen since the first legal women's movement "La Ligue Belge du Droits des Femmes" had been founded in 1892 and the end of his research stops in 1960, which is also the year Congo gained its independence (Heyvaert, 2015, p. 292). Nevertheless, colonialism might have ended but coloniality persist to this day. With this study, Heyvaert (2015) wanted to explore Belgian feminists' contributions and attitudes towards colonialism. Heyvaert (2015, p. 307) indicates that White feminists in Belgium participated in the colonial project because of what he calls "strategic opportunism". White feminists assumed that if they played a significant role in the colonisation project, they would be rewarded for this with recognition and (more) civil rights (Heyvaert, 2015, p. 295). Belgian feminists migrated to Congo to impose Western superiority thinking on Congolese women and rescue them from - what they called - their state of "backwardness" (Heyvaert, 2015, p. 302). Belgian feminists encouraged and upheld the discourse of White women in Congo and expressed pride in the civilising mission. The White female contribution in Belgium's colonial project allowed White women in Belgium to gain recognition and fuller citizenship in Belgium (Heyvaert, 2015, p. 297). White women were gaining rights in Belgium at the expense of Black women in Congo, White feminists felt superior to Black women for a long time – and some still do. Ideologies of

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[20] The journals were the following: "La Ligue the journal of Ligue Belge du Droit des Femmes, the first Belgian feminist organisation. Cahier Féministes the journal of transnational committee led by Isabelle Gatti de Gamond. Le Féminisme Chrétien de Belgique led by Louise Van den Plas. L'International Féminin » the journal of Société Belge pour l'Amélioration du Sort de la Femme, Bulletin du Conseil National des Femmes Belges » the journal of the Conseil National des Femmes Belges" (Heyvaert, 2015, p. 299).

Western superiority, colonial logic, and misogynoir lies at the root of Belgian feminism which still haunts contemporary mainstream feminism in Belgium[21].

2.5.1 Feminist literature and intersectional invisibility

Black women in Belgium are further marginalized since conversations about racism tend to focus on issues related to Black men, while discourses about sexism tend to focus on the experiences of White women (Goff & Kahn, 2013). The reason for this could be because Black women are hardly ever acknowledged as part of the wider group "women" or as a category separate from Black men (as has been explained in 2.3.2.2). "When black people are talked about the focus tends to be on black *men*; and when women are talked about the focus tends to be on *White women*. [Nowhere] is this more evident than in the vast body of feminist literature" (hooks, 1981, p. 7). One recent example is the following article which was published on 8th March 2021, on International Women's Day and described why an International Women's Day is still so necessary. The article[22] was written by VUB professor of sociology and head of the Sociology department, Ignace Glorieux. Let us examine two passages from the article in Dutch.[23]

We kunnen dus concluderen dat zowel de vrouwenbeweging als de vrouwendag jammer genoeg nog steeds nodig zijn: ze moeten vrouwen en mannen blijven bewust maken van de subtiele en minder subtiele mechanismen die leiden tot deze onrechtvaardige ongelijkheid. En dan hebben we het nog niet gehad over (seksueel) geweld, bewuste discriminatie en onderdrukking ... laat staan over vrouwen die geen auto mogen besturen of over genitale verminking[24] (Glorieux Ignace, 2021, p. 1).

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[21] See Bracke (2005) for a detailed description of the complicit behaviour of White feminists and imperialist attitudes towards Congolese people.

[22] Glorieux, I. (2021, March 8). *'De afgelopen 50 jaar is er noch voor zwarten, noch voor vrouwen veel veranderd.'* TOR. Retrieved March 13, 2023, from https://torvub.be/de-afgelopen-50-jaar-is-er-noch-voor-zwarten-noch-voor-vrouwen-veel-veranderd/#:~:text=John%20Lennon%20maakte%20er%20later,noch%20voor%20vrouwen%20veel%20veranderd

[23] Despite the fact that the full article was studied, we were forced due to the limited scope of this thesis to put forward only two passages.

[24] "So, we can conclude that both the women's movement and Women's Day are unfortunately still needed: they must continue to make women and men aware of the subtle and not so subtle mechanisms that lead to this unjust inequality. Not to mention (sexual) violence, deliberate discrimination and

Although he does not say so explicitly, Glorieux refers to White Western women when he uses the term *woman* in his article. The final sentence of the following passage reads, "En dan hebben we het nog niet gehad over (seksueel) geweld, bewuste discriminatie en onderdrukking... laat staan over vrouwen die geen auto mogen besturen of over genitale verminking" (Glorieux, 2021, p. 1). He only refers to women of colour in the final sentence of this paragraph when discussing the ban on women driving and the practice of genital mutilation. According to reports (Chulov, 2017), Saudi Arabia was the only country where it was illegal[25] for women to drive a car, and some countries in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East permit genital mutilation (RoSa vzw, 2023). All of these countries are non-Western ones which allegedly states that he is referring to non-White and/or non-Western women. Moreover, the final sentence relates to non-White and/or non-Western women and is introduced after an enumeration with "[…] laat staan over […]". Linguistically, *laat staan over* is a conjunctive expression where the preposition must be negative which is the case in this article (Nederlands woordenboek, n.d.). *Laat staan over* means to 'say nothing of'. In other words, according to how that sentence is introduced it *says nothing of* Black women nor women of colour. In an article about the social status of women, Black women and women of colour were omitted. This implies, in a sense, that women of colour and Black women are not equally important in the movement for women's rights, that they are merely an afterthought in the fight for equality. Throughout the whole, article consciously or unconsciously, nothing is said of or about Black women except in the aforementioned penultimate paragraph.

'Woman is the niger of the world', zei Yoko Ono in een interview ruim 50 jaar geleden. John Lennon maakte er later een liedje van ("We tell her home is the only place she should be. Then we complain that she's too unworldly to be our friend"). Ondertussen mogen we het n-woord niet meer gebruiken, maar verder is er de afgelopen 50 jaar noch voor zwarten, noch voor vrouwen veel veranderd. Er is nog veel werk aan de winkel[26] (Glorieux Ignace, 2021, p. 1).

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oppression ... let alone women not being allowed to drive a car or genital mutilation" (Glorieux, 2021, own translation).

[25] In Saudi Arabia the ban on women driving a car was lifted in 2018.

[26] " 'Woman is the niger of the world,' Yoko Ono said in an interview over 50 years ago. John Lennon later made a song out of it ("We tell her home is the only place she should be. Then we complain that she is too unworldly to be our friend"). Meanwhile, we are no longer allowed to use the n-word, but otherwise nothing has really changed in the past 50 years neither for Black people nor women. There is still much work to be done" (Glorieux, 2021, own translation).

"Ondertussen mogen we het n-woord niet meer gebruiken, maar verder is er de afgelopen 50 jaar noch voor zwarten, noch voor vrouwen veel veranderd" – firstly, the first part of this sentence "ondertussen mogen we het n-woord niet meer gebruiken", appears to imply the author begrudges this fact. This, too, appears to imply that there is no consideration for the experiences or perspectives of Black men and Black women in this debate, but rather a re-centering of the White experience and the discomfort of, what the author most likely believes is "political correctness" gone mad. Secondly, where do Black women fit in this sentence or within this article, given that their existence consists of both identities as women and as Black. This phrase clearly demonstrates the phenomena of intersectional invisibility (described in section 2.4.1), since it fails to differentiate between Black women and Black men. Even though Glorieux does not explicitly refer to White women in this line, he again uses the term woman to refer to *White women*, and the term black to refer to black *men*. This sentence fails to distinguish between Black women and Black men; presumably this is due to Black women rarely being recognized as a subgroup of the larger category of "women" or as a distinct category from Black men. This reinforces the masculinization of Black women and singles out Black women from the societal category "women" (Evelynn Hammonds, 1997; Goff & Kahn, 2013; Coles & Pasek, 2020;). Black women are openly excluded from gender equality discourses when scholars fail to consider race as a component equally valuable to gender and fail to research both race and gender simultaneously. The process of racialization has caused researchers to use the term "woman" to unconsciously or consciously refer to the experiences of White women (Frances Beale, 1970; hooks, 1981, p. 8). However, this engrained behaviour, whether intentional or unintentional, promotes misogynoir because it ignores and denies the presence and existence of Black women in Flemish and thus Belgian society (hooks, 1981, p. 8).

In conclusion, throughout the whole article there is no consideration of the simultaneous identity of being Black *and* woman which indicates a single-axis approach. By taking such a stance in an article about the women's movement, Black women are left out of the conversation because they distinguish between being Black *or* being woman although these identities—being Black and being woman—are inexorably interwoven. In both the title "De afgelopen 50 jaar is er noch voor zwarten, noch voor vrouwen veel veranderd" and the penultimate sentence of the last paragraph "Ondertussen mogen we het n-woord niet meer gebruiken, maar verder is er de afgelopen 50 jaar noch voor zwarten, noch voor vrouwen veel veranderd" there is a comparison made between Black people and women. The article talks extensively about the social standing

of women and only briefly (one sentence) about the social status of "*Blacks*", highlighting how little has changed for either group over the previous 50 years. By frequently drawing parallels between "*Blacks*" and women one is suggesting that the term "woman" is synonymous for White women and "Black" synonymous for Black men. It makes it seem unnecessary to acknowledge the existence of both being Black *and* woman, which excludes Black women from conversations and narratives in books and writings on "women's issues" and struggles (hooks, 1981, p. 8-9; Heidi Safia Mirza, 2003). This demonstrates that the rhetoric of the movement itself, which professes to be interested in issues such as sexist oppression, has "a sexist-racist attitude against Black women" (hooks, 1981, p. 8; hooks, 2015). The long-held notion in the women's movement that one could not oppress others while one is being oppressed ensured that White feminists did – and some still do – not condemn their own sexist and racist viewpoints against Black women (hooks, 1981; Kendall, 2020). "The racial and sexual specificity is left unacknowledged" (hooks, 1981, p. 7;) in this article, marginalizing and relegating Black women to the periphery of the conversation on gender equality in Flemish society.

3   Methodology

3.1   Positionality

According to Louise Folkes (2022), reflexivity is a crucial element for research positionality within qualitative research, therefore I will critically reflect on my own positionality within the scope of my research subject and the scientific field wherein this research will be carried out. To do so I will locate my positionality as a researcher by identifying my social markers – gender, race and nationality (Jeff Rose, 2020). Moreover, my political stance is further influenced by my social markers which will have inevitably an impact on the research process and context. Holmes states that (2020, p. 2) a "reflexive approach" strays away, from the idea that social markers whether they are "culturally ascribed" or "fluid" cannot have an impact on your research. This approach encourages the researcher to take into account their social markers and realize that their position in society, will inevitably have an effect on how they interpret ontological and epistemological beliefs and assumptions about society, and this will further impact their research process and results (Brian Bourke, 2014; Jon Dean et al., 2018; Holmes, 2020; Kate Haddow, 2021).

I identify myself as a 26-year-old Black woman student in academia with a migration background and I am also perceived as such within Flanders' society. Sandrine Ingabire (2020, p. 57) contends that there is a significant lack of research carried out on Black women in Flanders, therefore I decided to contribute to fill that void by carrying out a study researching misogynoir within feminist discourse in Flanders. Traditionally, researchers have been warned not to research possible topics which are seen to be "too close" to their own lived experiences or situations, for fear that this would result in research which is "too subjective" (Kim England, 1994). This has led to important research not being undertaken and this has disproportionally affected topics related to minorities and in particular Black women in Belgium (Modi Ntambwe, 2020).

The outsider-within status coined by Patricia Hill Collins combats this myth that Black women producing knowledge within their own community is seen as "subjective" or "irrelevant" (Collins 2000). Sandra Harding (in Rikke Andreassen & Lene Myong, 2017, p. 98) argues that knowledge production and academic criticism can never be objective and is always to some extent biased. Due to dominant European and Western ways of knowledge production, Collins (2000) pleaded for alternative ways of presenting knowledge in academia and claimed that these can be equally valid. Adrienne Rich believed that lived experiences should be a crucial epistemological principle for social research to combat dominant worldviews – for example derogatory stereotypes – towards minorities (Rich, 1979; Liz Stanley & Sue Wise, 2002).

Another important point we must make is the relation between positionality, authority and race. As a Black woman cultivating knowledge on misogynoir in an academic institution that has been historically led by White male dominant standards of knowledge creation, the absence of Whiteness may position my knowledge production automatically as "subjective" (Ramón Grosfoguel, 2013). Because as claimed by Anne-Jorunn Berg (2008, p. 214) Whiteness inherently stands for "scientific objectivity" and in return Blackness inherently stands for "scientific subjectivity" within knowledge production. In other words, race can be a denominator as to whether or not knowledge production is viewed as objective. However, standpoint feminism denotes that objective knowledge is a myth, a utopia that can never be fulfilled by anyone regardless of their social markers such as race or gender (Andreassen & Myong, 2017, p. 99).

According to the philosophy of standpoint feminism my intersection of being Black and a woman is what allows for the methodology of this study. Standpoint feminism beliefs that this unique outsider-within status allows for new insights and innovative ways of conducting research involving inequity (Veronika Kisfalvi, 2006; Alison Wylie, 2013). As this study researches whether or not there are hidden power dynamics between race, gender and inequality in language by employing a critical discourse analysis, standpoint feminism's philosophy of using lived experiences as a tenet allows us to reveal hidden or overlooked elements carried out by traditional research (Collins 2000). Nevertheless, this is not to say that my unique position as outsider-within or my critical discourse interpretation is unbiased but as Andreassen & Myong (2017, p. 98) state: "knowledge produced from the margins provides valuable insights into the workings of the uneven distribution of power and privilege."

Lastly, as a diaspora of African origin, I discovered that knowledge creation by Black women intellectuals from African descent was completely absent from both my undergraduate and graduate language studies in Belgium. My education was mostly framed from a dominant European perspective, which has affected how I process information and perceive society as a whole. Therefore, undertaking this thesis has been an active process of deliberately unlearning and relearning Eurocentric perspectives on language, gender, feminism and knowledge creation within wider society.

3.2   Research methods

Firstly, the corpus of this study is a collection of political written texts on gender equality and women's rights. The annual plan text makes up the majority of the data, with texts from the organization's website and texts from other documents that are referred to in the annual plan. To analyse the corpus, we used critical discourse analysis this is a qualitative research method used across numerous academic fields such as linguistics, anthropology, sociology, and more (Amy Luo, 2023). However, in contrast to linguistics CDA in this study is not focused on linguistic aspects of language such as phonology, morphology or syntax. In the object of this study, a CDA framework is used to focus on how language relates to the social, political, and historical context and ideologies wherein power dynamics are created. It is important to note that CDA encourages the use of a mixed-method approach, and hence the methods utilized in this study are not a "universal" method that applies to each study, in order to address the

research topic, each study will need to develop its unique techniques (Tamara Witschge, 2008, p. 79).

Secondly, this study is carried out as part of my Master's degree in Multilingual Mediation and Communication, therefore we believed it was important to place the focus on language. In European feminist studies the relationship between gender and language was heavily researched during the third "feminist wave" (Deborah Cameron, 1998, p. 945). However according to Miriam Glucksmann (2008, p. 405), there seemed to be a significant omission of race in European feminism. Terese Jonsson contends that (2016, p. 58), the erasure of Black feminists and feminists of colour has serious ramifications for feminist politics and its expression in texts and written-down theories. We therefore decided in this study, to scrutinize the relationship between gender, discourse and race using critical discourse analysis.

As a result, we made the decision to analyse written language within a political framework, in this case the text of the Vrouwenraad's annual plan 2022. We decided to focus on key elements using a mixed-method approach where we combine critical discourse analysis with the concept of intersectionality as coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) to discover, challenge, question and or reveal discursive patterns related to themes such as intersectionality, gender equality and women's rights.

Thirdly, as the literature review is an integral part of this study, we have constructed a theoretical framework to guide our analysis. Within the theoretical framework, we conducted a literature review to provide a political and historical understanding of the early on oppression of Black women during Belgium's colonial era. We provided a social context in which the intersectionality of being Black and woman was profoundly analysed and thoroughly explained. The information for the literature review was found through scientific search engines and academic online databanks such as Jstor, Google scholar and (online) books focused on the category of "woman" and what it entails for Black women of Sub-Saharan descent. We searched the online data banks using words such as intersectionality, feminism, Black feminist thought, gender equality, and the intersection of gender and race. In terms of terminology we used Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality who coined the term to specifically indicate and identify the intersecting identity of being Black and woman. Within our theoretical framework, we applied concepts such as misogynoir from an African feminist and Black

feminist perspective. Because of the snowball effect we found literature that connected the intersection of gender and race to colonialism. We ended up discovering that the intersection of gender and race are connected to coloniality and have its roots in colonialism.

By scanning through existing literature, we provided a semantic historical framework in which we dissected and thus explained the broader socio-political context within which the experiences of Black women have been shaped throughout pre-colonial, during colonial, and post-colonial era. We paid particular attention to the intersection of race and gender in which the intersectional identity of Black women was explained into detail. The examination of the historical background of feminism which we discovered was tied to colonialism, led us to the historical exclusion of race within European women's movements which in turn led to the exclusion of the intersecting identity of Black women which eventually resulted into Black women being marginalized and oppressed within the women's movement. By scrutinizing these historical dynamics, we offered a framework for understanding the early oppression and exclusion of Black women in European feminism, including Belgium's first women's movement.

Throughout the stage of exploration and collecting information on feminism and women's issues in Flanders, we discovered a scarcity of scientific research on misogynoir and the intersection between gender and race within Flanders' feminist studies field. This allowed us to identify a potential gap in the literature and the need to investigate the exclusion of Black women's experiences in scientific research on women's issues in Flanders. Hence why the Vrouwenraad's annual plan which is a political agenda on feminism in Flanders was selected as a case study in this research. As an umbrella organization, it plays a significant, exemplary role in advocating for women's rights in Flanders on a national, federal and even European level. By analysing discursive patterns within the annual plan, we are investigating to which extent Black women's experiences are included in their policy.

3.3   Brief introduction of the Women's Council

The Women's Council in Belgium, also known as *de Vrouwenraad* in Dutch is an umbrella organization that promotes equal rights and opportunities for women. The focus is to ensure the protection of equal rights in Flanders' society.

Founded in 1905, Marie Popelin was the prominent figure to unite several feminists and their organizations under the banner of the Conseil National des Femmes Belges (CNFB). At its very beginning the majority of the Council was made up by women of the French speaking community in Belgium. In 1974 the CNFB split between a French-speaking community and a Dutch-speaking community as a result of the growing presence of Dutch-speaking women. Both the French and the Dutch-speaking community of the Women Council became formally independent in 1979. However, they continued to keep working together advocating for women's rights (Vrouwenraad, 2022a).

The Vrouwenraad operates at a regional, national and European level and works closely with partner organizations, several feminist organizations, and political groups to protect and represent their stances on women's rights. The Vrouwenraad has an advisory role and offers expert advice to the government overseeing that women have equal opportunities in all facets of society. By providing their expertise on inequality they aim to have an impact on laws and policies to enhance the general position of women's rights in Belgium. Moreover, in order to be well-informed, the Vrouwenraad carries out research, gathers information and analyses data on topics such as the gender pay gap, sexism, violence on women, harmful stereotypes, etc. Next to having an advisory role, they organize workshops, campaigns, and collaborate with experts on issues related to inequality to strengthen the collective effort on advocating for equal rights (Vrouwenraad, 2022a).

3.4   A research framework through the lens of intersectionality

Given that historically, feminism in Europe has denied race as a valuable component to research gender issues it becomes crucial to implement a methodological framework that takes into account intersecting identities (Hazel Carby, 2004; Lewis, 2013; Françoise Vergès & Ashely Bohrer, 2021). More importantly an intersectional framework allows us to reveal the complexity between gender and racial dynamics within discourse. Intersectionality as a research framework allows us to analyse which intersecting oppressive systems are hold into place which allows intersecting identities to go through oppression (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2000; Ntambwe, 2020). As Rosalba Icaza & Sara de Jong (2019, p. xxi) explain, "Belgium, and Flanders especially, serves its public a particularly mono-cultural, monochrome, and Eurocentric version of reality". This monochromatic reality is also reflected in the

overrepresentation of White women as the primary subject of scientific research related to women's issues. The dominance of research related to one particular form of sexism only affecting a specific group of women, negatively impacts the need to address and rectify the substantial underrepresentation of the lived experiences of Black women within scientific discourse in Belgium (Ntambwe, 2020, p. 128; Sophie Withaeckx, 2019, p. 28). Therefore, it becomes crucial to implement an intersectional research framework that allows us to create and cultivate a scientific space for Black women's experiences and voices which have been historically silenced and oppressed. So, when taking into account gender dynamics in feminist studies it becomes important to equally and simultaneously address racial dynamics and include Black women's experiences into Flanders' feminism.

3.5   Critical discourse analysis

By interrogating the discourse of the Vrouwenraad through their channels such as their website and annual plan, we are going to examine the language being used: which stories do they hold on to? Which story is put at the centre? Which part of the story is not being told? And tie those reflections to Black feminist epistemology. This critical discourse analysis will examine to what extent the intersection of gender and race – uniquely that of Black women – are integrated in the discourse of the Vrouwenraad.

According to Jan Blommaert & Chris Bulcaen (2000, p. 448), the goal of critical discourse analysis (CDA) is to reveal uneven power dynamics in society. This analytical tool investigates how language and discourse maintain certain power relations, ideologies, and social inequities. Critical discourse analysis enables us to uncover apparent but, more crucially, hidden inequality mechanisms in language by beginning to scrutinize and test language against social reality.

Furthermore, Michelle Lazar (2007) argues that critical discourse analysis is not an abstract truth and hence is not neutral; rather, it is a forceful critical reflection on power relations and power dynamics inside and outside a specific culture. For that reason CDA is also considered the "critical turn in studies of language" (Jan Blommaert & Chris Bulcaen, 2000, p. 447). When CDA is applied to topics such as race, gender, and class we may examine how language and power interact and how social inequalities currently manifest themselves through discursive patterns (Ruth Wodak, 1997, p. 173, Norman Fairclough, 1992). CDA gives us the ability to

question, challenge, reveal and ultimately break discursive patterns in society that consciously or unconsciously uphold social inequality systems in society. This critical paradigm not only analyses discursive patterns such as discourse and rhetoric but it also takes into account the broader scope of socio-political and historical contexts wherein these discursive patterns were and are constructed or take place (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Lilie Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 4).

Michel Foucault (1976, p. 49) underlines the importance of revealing the latent force behind language written or spoken. He explains that while it is a fact that language is made up of signs, language does more than only name objects. Language has the ability to create social realities and while there is no (tangible) power in language itself, the use of language does have and holds power (Foucault, 1970). By employing CDA researchers are able to bring awareness on discriminatory realities and promote alternatives that generate equity, and social justice. The aim is to break away from ingrained discriminatory patterns and stimulate societal change.

3.6 Overall structure of the annual plan

The annual plan 2022 was drafted by the members of the Vrouwenraad, and published by them. Its aim is to reinforce gender equality in Flanders next to striving towards a caring society (Vrouwenraad, 2022a). Since the Vrouwenraad plays a political role in promoting gender equality in Flemish society, the annual plan is an attempt to further political dialogue on the subject. Since the annual plan acts as a political discourse for gender equality in Flanders, it is essential that this document is made easily accessible to the public.

The first step into the analysis was acquiring a comprehensive understanding of the annual plan[27]. In doing so, the annual plan was thoroughly dissected: we paid meticulous attention to the language used, the stated goals and the strategies proposed for achieving gender equality. The annual plan consists of an introduction where the Vrouwenraad reflects on the previous year and states their goals for the next one, their ambitions involving three themes: banning violence on girls and women, combatting and making sexism and stereotypes visible, transitioning to a caring society. Adjacent to ambitions they have, "accents" meaning matters on which they wish to place emphasis: a young and diverse audience, women with a migration

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[27] The annual plan can be consulted in the appendix

background, public space and anti-feminist movement. Following accents, they move on to "focus points" in which they focus on: intersectionality and infographics & factsheets. Next, they have "other aspects" in which they focus on archiving, the news, international decision making, United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (involving women, peace and security). This is followed by a summary in which they summarize their goals, mention their political involvement, and their cooperation with other members regarding societal justice, and lastly a list of the members they represent on a national, federal and European level (Vrouwenraad, 2022b).

3.7 Frame analysis

CDA requires an inquiring tool called framing; according to Goffman: in Delon Alain Omrow (2018, p. 15), "frames are configurations used to categorize and organize human experience." A human experience involves the lived experiences of humans as a subjective interpretation of reality, giving meaning to the social and cultural context of events based on their political stance and social markers (Erving Goffman, 1974, p. 10). This study employs frames as an interpretative framework of the lived experiences of Black women based on a "constructivist" and "critical" approach (Stephen D. Reese, 2007, p. 149). As mentioned before this study is invested in language as a social practice rather than the grammatical dimension of language. Therefore, we are invested in the critical perspective which enables us to analyse language as a hegemonic power to examine the extent of inclusion of Black women's unique intersection within feminist political discourse.

Due to time constraints and the magnitude of this thesis, we are unable to discuss every sentence/paragraph of the annual plan and extra documents. We therefore decided to examine global themes that were relevant to this study. The annual plan's main topics that were also essential to answering the research question were equality, intersectionality, and women's rights. Based on those themes, we highlighted the most relevant passages and analysed them in depth. We looked for language, terms, and concepts related to gender, intersectionality, women's rights, and equality. We analysed whether or not there were discursive elements that considered the unique intersection of Black women within the ideology of Black feminism and Afro-feminism.

After an exhaustive read of the annual plan, we closely examined the Vrouwenraad's three main ambitions. 1) "ban violence on women and girls", 2) "combatting and making sexism and stereotypes visible", 3) "supporting the transition towards a caring society". For each ambition, we went to identify discursive elements such as paragraphs and phrases that could be attributed to themes and patterns relevant to the research question. We looked at the stated challenges, the goals and the suggested solutions and determined on the basis of discursive elements to examine to what extent the challenges, the goals and the solutions stated were intersectional enough according to African and Black feminist ideology.

We provide three frames in which Black women are either excluded or in risk of becoming so. The data was categorised into the three following frames: omission frame, power dynamic frame, and ideology frame. This categorisation process within discourse analysis can be referred to as "coding" (Omrow, 2018, p. 16; Clive Seale,1999; Stephanie Taylor, 2001). This process facilitates researchers to discover discursive patterns which then can be attributed to their frame-analysis and translated into social and contextual "repertoires" for understanding social processes within language (Nigel Edley, 2001; Omrow, 2018, p. 16).

Table 1. Frames for the inclusion of Black women's unique intersection of gender and race (Based on a content analysis of the Vrouwenraad's annual plan 2022). [28]

Frame	Explanation
Omission frame	Lack of mention or discussion of leaky pipeline processes, issues, or concerns that are particularly pertinent to the experiences of Black women which allegedly has an impact on Black women's political representation, access to resources, and visibility in the workforce, as well as their safety in society. Which lived experiences or concerns are highlighted or ignored in the text.
Power dynamic frame	Hierarchical dynamics that reflect a power imbalance within the discourse of the annual plan, such power relations may uphold attitudes of coloniality feeding into the marginalized position of Black women as subordinate and "Othering" them in discourse.

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[28] This frame analysis was inspired by the methodological approach used in Delon Alain Omrow's article on discourse analysis (Omrow, 2018, p. 17).

Ideology frame	A prevalent dominant ideology that may have influenced the framing of the annual plan. Such discourse may uphold an ideological bias rooted within a broader historical, social and political contextual framework upholding a hegemonic structure which presumably keeps Black women in the margin.

4   Discourse analysis

4.1   Omission frame: what story is not being told?

> Example 1: There is no consideration for racially motivated reasons as to allegedly not to file a complaint for gender-based violence within police or law enforcement structures.

Voor slachtoffers van fysiek en online seksueel geweld blijkt het nog steeds niet evident om klacht in te dienen bij de politie. Heel wat mensen durven deze stap niet te zetten. Dat is de conclusie uit de vele verhalen die recent verzameld werden over seksueel geweld via #balancetonbar/meldet.org. [...] De analyse van de getuigenissen zal ons toelaten de bestaande dossiers te actualiseren en bijkomende beleidsaanbevelingen te formuleren met betrekking tot de drempels die mensen ervan weerhouden om klacht in te dienen. Dit initiatief zal verder uitgewerkt worden in 2022 omdat we hierbij meerdere partnerorganisaties willen betrekken in functie van een inclusief eindproduct (Vrouwenraad, 2022b, p. 5)[29]

The stated challenge in the text is that: "for victims of physical and online sexual violence, filing complaints with the police still appears to not be an easy task" (Vrouwenraad, 2022b, p. 5, own translation). The suggested solution for this challenge is: "the analysis of the testimonies will allow us to update the existing cases and make additional policy recommendations regarding the barriers that prevent people from filing complaints" (Vrouwenraad, 2022b, p. 5, own translation). There appears to be an omission frame within the suggested solution for the challenge stated: for each group of women, the threshold to whether or not to file a complaint can be different, so who defines or identifies what a threshold is or should be? How can you identify thresholds that uniquely impact Black women? A valid question here is do Black women always feel safe in police structures and

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[29] Ambition 1: ban violence on girls and women

law enforcement dynamics to file a complaint? According to the European Network Against (2021) racism report on "police brutality and racialized communities", different countries across Europe such as Croatia, Greek, Bulgaria and Belgium have reported instances of racist behaviour and police brutality against racialized groups (2021, p. 50). As stated by ENAR "the abuse ranges from humiliation and verbal intimidation to actual physical violence" (2021a, p. 20). They further claim that certain racialized people "live in fear" of racist police brutality since they are aware of instances of such violence within their community (ENAR, 2021a, p. 48). Black women could potentially find themselves in a perilous position, unsure of where to seek refuge when it comes to gender-based violence, as the very structures that are put into place to help identify and combat gender-based violence are the very structures that appear to perpetuate violence and racist behaviour towards their community. Fear of police and law enforcement is definitely an element that needs to be considered when discussing gender-based violence in order to include Black women in the conversation of banning violence against girls and women to advocate for a gender-inclusive approach to gender-based violence (Crenshaw et al., 2015). The implication of not incorporating this fundamentally important threshold may have serious consequences in the analysis and recommendations made to protect all women including Black women and girls. The absent of such a vital element might have a negative impact on the safety of Black girls and Black women.

Example 2: When discussing sexism there is an absence of discussion on how sexism intersects with race

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Seksisme blijft alomtegenwoordig, en dit op verschillende niveaus en domeinen. Enkel door in te breken op traditionele patriarchale manieren van kijken, tonen en percipiëren kunnen we ook werken aan het loslaten van gegenderde verwachtingspatronen in verband met rollen en identiteit, en kunnen we vooroordelen en discriminatie aanpakken (Vrouwenraad, 2022b, p. 7).[30]

Stated challenge for visible: "Sexism remains pervasive, and at different levels and domains." (Vrouwenraad, 2022b, p. 7, own translation), stated solution: "Only by breaking into traditional patriarchal ways of seeing, showing and perceiving can we also work to release gendered

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[30] Ambition 2: combatting and making sexism and stereotypes visible

expectations related to roles and identity, and address prejudice and discrimination" (Vrouwenraad, 2022b, p. 7, own translation). An omission frame is present here: in the text, they mention that sexism appears on different levels and domains but they do not mention sexism at the intersection of gender and race. If we look at the text, there is an explicit omission of race. If we consider this omission in a broader context, there is an ideological bias frame that marginalizes and excludes Black women. Only mentioning patriarchal and not colonial ways of considering stereotypes implies "a single-axis analysis of women's oppression based on a particularized patriarchy" that only targets a specific group of women who are not affected by racialized oppression (Tamale, 2020, p. 79). This single-axis lens affects Black women in the fight to combat stereotypes. Black women's stereotypes and sexism stem from colonialism and thus racialization not taking these two massive components mutually into account when analysing sexism and stereotypes excludes Black women from the conversation and discourse into combatting both sexism and stereotypes. There is an explicit omission of misogynoir, a form of sexism that targets Black women specifically. The literature shows that roles and expectations are not only gender based but most definitely also based on race (Sharla D. Biefeld et al., 202). Expectation patterns and gender roles differ according to race and gender, only taking gender into account excludes women who do not belong to normative gender expectations which are reportedly based on White women's experiences. Therefore, it is important to consider gender and race mutually when analysing sexism and stereotypes if you want to include Black women in the conversation.

By not incorporating racially-gendered stereotypes these stereotypes rooted in misogynoir end up under the radar. And because stereotypes such as the "angry Black woman" and many others as listed in chapter 2.4.1 are underexposed, understudied (in the scientific fields in Flanders), and not explicitly mentioned in the policy the danger lies in reproducing, reinforcing, and ultimately perpetuating these stereotypes. For example, often when Black women are being assertive or trying to defend themselves the stereotype of the angry Black woman tends to manifest in order to keep Black women "into the narrowest range of human experiences" to deflect from the situation and to dismiss and disregard any argument coming from Black women (Ruby Hamad, 2020, p. 48). Doing thorough research and including such stereotypes into the annual plan helps to raise awareness and to avoid perpetuating this misconception when an occurrence happens.

> Example 3: The terms intersectionality and race are not mentioned in the National Action Plan.

Not only does the Vrouwenraad operate on a national level, it also keeps it institution up-to-date on an international level following the decision-making processes regarding women's rights within the United Nations amongst other prominent institutions (Vrouwenraad, 2022b p. 19). As observed on their website and in their annual plan the Vrouwenraad has a campaign "vrouwenkracht is vredesmacht" in collaboration with the United Nations resolution 1325 (Vrouwenraad, 2023c). This resolution strives to protect women and girls during war and to present women as peacemakers. De Vrouwenraad attempts to translate these resolutions into the Flemish policy, a National Action Plan[31] was drafted up for Belgium to also implement the norms and values found within the UN resolution 1325. The words intersectionality and race were conspicuously absent in the National Action Plan whereas the word gender, be it alone or in compound form, was found 129 times. Only one particular form of the patriarchy is thoroughly discussed and analysed in the National Action Plan. The absence of the compounded forms of gender-related discrimination refers to a dominant ideology. There is an omission of how gender intersects with race and how that impacts "other" women, in this case Black women. The ideological bias lies in the implication that the protection of women only beholds a particular group of women that are affected by a particular form of the patriarchy – sexism. The patriarchy and its forms on violence on women is so much more than the particular forms of sexism raised within the National Action Plan. There is no analysis of how the patriarchy intersects with race and gender simultaneously and what impact this has on Black women.

Moreover, the lacuna on intersecting identities with race and gender greatly overlooks the lived experiences and thus the unique intersection of Black women, this may indicate the homogenous dominance of the authoritative individuals in control of the National Action Plan development procedures. In the annual plan, we equally find a particular form of the patriarchy that is regularly brought to the foreground which is sexism, the forms of sexism that intersect with race are highly underexposed. Patriarchal issues that conspicuously pertain to Black women are not mentioned within the annual, words such as "misogynoir" are non-existent in the annual plan.

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[31] Consult the National Action Plan here:
https://igvm-iefh.belgium.be/sites/default/files/downloads/1325_napwps4_nl.pdf

4.2 Power dynamic frame: whose voices are neglected?

Example 1: Are refugees and asylum seekers systemically included?

Gendergerelateerd geweld wordt steeds meer erkend als een ernstige uitdaging voor asielzoekers (VIB's: Verzoekers om Internationale Bescherming). De huidige opvangcrisis en de toestand in het algemeen versterken de risicofactoren voor gendergerelateerd geweld op meisjes, vrouwen, en LGBTQIA+ mensen. De Vrouwenraad pleit voor een structurele aanpak van gendergerelateerd geweld in de context van asiel en migratie. In 2022 willen we samen met vluchtelingen en asielzoekers als ervaringsdeskundigen een sensibiliseringscampagne opzetten rond gendergerelateerd geweld in collectieve opvangcentra. De uitvoering ervan zal met Fedasil en het Rode Kruis besproken worden (Vrouwenraad, 2022b, p. 5).[32]

Stated challenge: "Gender-based violence is increasingly recognised as a serious challenge for asylum seekers" (Vrouwenraad, 2022b, p. 5, own translation), the stated solution in the text: "in 2022, we want to launch a campaign rasing awareness on gender-based violence in collective reception centres together with refugees and asylum seekers as experts by experience" (Vrouwenraad, 2022b, p. 5, own translation). A power dynamic frame can be identified within this paragraph. A critical question that can be raised here is: are the voices and perspectives of asylum seekers and refugees systematically and continuously invited to the table? In the introduction on page three of the annual plan they mention that they do not want to "raise diversity to a different category" but if the answer on the first question is no, then they unintentionally are treating these precarious voices as an excess by only valuing them as "experts by experience." Rutazibwa (2018, p. 169) warns that true inclusivity does not mean adding more "diverse" or "silenced voices" to a project or framework that already exists. Instead, these voices and perspectives should be systematically and from the beginning invited to the table. Incorporating these voices from the early beginning is crucial since, once a project has already been written down, adding these voices as an afterthought and only for a specific project – in this case a campaign –, implies they have little chance of being heard because they were invited at the table too late and not systematically and continuously – meaning these voices need to keep systematically being invited even after the campaign. Not implementing this strategy reinforces the exclusion and marginalization of such precarious voices.

Furthermore, on various occasions in the annual plan they refer to "the other" on page 2 we see

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[32] Ambition 1: ban violence on girls and women

that there is a genuine interest in identifying the thresholds of "the other" and establishing connections with "the other". However, as multiple times illustrated throughout this study referring to a group as "the other" begs for comparison, a comparison towards "the norm". This representation, in this case unconsciously, of a group represents itself in a hierarchy of "the norm" being above "the other". And while the goal is to connect this decisive language tends to disconnect groups of people.

[...] En bovenal is het onze opdracht als koepelorganisatie om te verbinden, te kijken wat onze gemeenschappelijke belangen en gronden zijn, en te luisteren naar de ander. [...] Hoe we kunnen praten met de ander in plaats van over de ander. En wat daarvoor nodig is, waar we tegenaan botsen als het over die gelijkheid gaat? [...] (Vrouwenraad, 2022b, p. 2)

Instead of perceiving groups as "the other" Gurminder Bhamabra in: Rutazibwa (2018, p. 166) argues that if we map out how our stories are related, the distinction for example between perceiving people as asylum seekers or migrants fade. If we can see and lay out the connectivity of our histories and how the world and its problems are interconnected, it makes it hard to perceive groups of people as "we" and "them". In the case of this study, it becomes of utmost importance to lay out the interconnected history of Black women and the Vrouwenraad as an institution, when Belgian women opted to take part in the colonial mission, their history merged with that of Black women. The Vrouwenraad known as "La Ligue du Droits des Femmes" supported and participated in the establishment of oppressive systems against Black women on the African continent (Bracke, 2005). When it is acknowledged that Black women's marginalization under the patriarchal framework was partly a female contribution, using phrases like "the other" becomes challenging. Instead this acknowledgement may pave the way towards taking accountability and responsibility for Black women's exclusion and uphold marginalization within Belgium's women's movement. To include Black women in the debates and conversations on women's issues in Belgium, we need to analyse how this colonial feminist history impacts Black women in today's society in Belgium.

Example 2: A reading space discussing sexism, who is reading and what books are they reading?

Hiervoor willen we graag een leessalon oprichten en aan de hand van literatuur onderzoeken hoe dit te doorbreken, welke kaders er al bestaan in romans en essays. Ons salon zal openstaan

voor eenieder die interesse heeft om samen dieper te graven en kritisch te reflecteren. We zullen daarbij inzetten op werving van jongeren. Graag organiseren we dit op wisselende relevante locaties. Hiervoor schakelen we het lokale netwerk via www.gelijkekansengemeente.be in. We zullen ook trachten een nieuwe doelgroep te bereiken door werving via de openbare bibliotheken, en we nodigen op themagerichte wijze auteurs uit. We denken ook aan een livestream in de bibliotheken (Vrouwenraad, 2022b, p. 7).[33]

The suggestion made here to break stereotypes and combat sexism is to organize a reading space researching literature. Although, self-reading and studying literature can be an effective approach to raise awareness and to challenge unconscious biases, the question here remains: Whose voices and narratives are being presented? Who are the authors and through which lens do they write? In addition, it is also important to consider the audience that reading space will attract. Will it attract a predominantly middle-class crowd? Highly educated feminists? And then there is the question of who will analyse and interpret this material, this obviously depends on which audience this activity will attract. Will the conversations remain mainly between highly educated, middle-class feminists or will this activity attract a diverse audience in terms of race, religion, gender, and class?

To detect the potential power-dynamic and hierarchy that lies in creating a reading space we need to be aware of the connection between authority, positionality, and race. According to Stine H. Bang Svendsen (2016), there is a legitimate link between positionality, authority and race in spaces where conversations about race and gender implicitly or explicitly take place. Important to realize is that within these conversations racial privilege plays a great role: White women are inherently positioned as objective, neutral and professional[34] whereas Black women are perceived as only experts by experience which means that when Black women voice their ideas or arguments their expertise will be reduced to only being able to speak about their "personal experiences" erasing their expertise in the matter (Andreassen & Myong, 2017, p. 99). Whiteness is categorized as normative and unmarked which means that when White people speak about racially-gendered topics their arguments will be perceived as "objective knowledge", that is applicable to wider society (Berg, 2008, p. 214). This implicit power-dynamic leads to Black women's voices, experiences, narratives and discourses being reduced

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[33] Ambition 2: combatting and making sexism and stereotypes visible
[34] This position of neutrality and objectiveness was first only preserved for White men and over time extended to White women because of their Whiteness (Andreassen & Myong, 2017, p. 99).

to only a "gut feeling" which impacts their credibility and expertise negatively. Furthermore, not shedding light to this power-dynamic feeds into silencing Black women's voices and dominant voices being privileged which eventually results into the marginalization of Black women in those spaces.

Example 3: The organisational core structure of the Vrouwenraad, a hierarchized space?

Next to having an advisory role to the government which consists of sharing their expertise on matters that involve gender equality and inequality, the Vrouwenraad also organizes other activities; for example, they have workshops, a blog, and a podcast where they discuss topics such as decolonization, ecofeminism, the public space and more (Vrouwenraad, 2023b). Within these activities, a diverse group of women with expertise come to the foreground, they hold space for Black women's voices and those of women of colour. But are those same voices invited at the table as colleagues next and within the core team of the Vrouwenraad when drafting an annual plan or policy plan? Who is not around the table at specific occasions? Such as when having an advisory role to the government? Who do they consider experts and who is deemed only an expert by experience? If Black women's voices are only upheld within a space where no real executive power lies, then according to the literature one treats their voices and expertise as a "multiculti plussing-up of […] inviting more of the silenced voices around the existing table" (Rutazibwa, 2018, p. 169). When and where do they invite Black women to co-create knowledge? Are Black women equally represented in decision-making processes during significant policy formulation or governmental affairs on topics such as equality, where substantial and consequential determinations are undertaken? Are Black women's voices equally represented in the organizational core structure of the Vrouwenraad?

In the introduction of the annual plan on page 3 critical questions are raised regarding inclusion, diversity and equality. This shows that there is a level of awareness and introspection in the organisation. They try to seek areas to improve in terms of barriers and difficulties in order to find equal solutions for all people.

[…] Zijn we inclusief genoeg? Welke uitsluitingsmechanismen zijn er maatschappelijk werkzaam? In hoeverre wordt de houding ten opzichte van de ander nog bepaald door een koloniaal paradigma? Kunnen we de diversiteit omarmen en slagen we erin iedereen te betrekken? De samenleving is meerstemmig, en als Vrouwenraad blijven wij ijveren voor

gelijke kansen voor alle vrouwen, samen met mannen en met iedereen die te lijden heeft onder patriarchale mechanismen. [...] (Vrouwenraad, 2022b, p.3).

They further state that they are still working towards achieving equal rights for all women and everyone else who is harmed by patriarchal norms. This demonstrates that the institution has intentions into wanting a society where equality is centred and where every individual can have equal opportunities in all facets of society. But the question here remains, can we be an advocate for women's rights and equal rights without having a diverse core group, in terms of race, gender, and class as agents of knowledge? Especially when the goal is to confront patriarchal structures. As the patriarchy is embedded in colonialism and inequality, this oppressive mechanism moulds itself into different forms depending on the environment, gender, and racialization of an individual. Can we really identify a specific form of a patriarchal structure if one has never experienced it, let alone recognize its manifestation and call it out?

According to Collins (2000, p. 329) a feminist institution where the core structure[35] is made up of an "overly [dominant] homogenous group" in terms of race and gender may contribute to a hierarchical dynamic. When a predominantly racial "homogenous group dominates" (Collins, 2000, p. 329) as to what approach to implement and to consider in decision-making settings in order to strive for equality, it may lead to the intersectional invisibility of Black women. White people are inherently a dominant group in such settings and a predominantly racial homogenous group filling authoritative positions enables or makes it easier for White women to contribute to a hierarchical dynamic where they could (un)consciously place themselves above women who are deemed as "the other". This begs the question of whether White people are prepared to relinquish their work position of prestige and power in favour of an atmosphere that fosters genuine inclusivity and in doing so make space for and include Black women.

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[35] Vrouwenraad. (2023, 8 August). Het team. Retrieved from https://vrouwenraad.be/team/

4.3   Ideology frame: what hegemonic belief system is being uphold?

Example 1: A care economy and the Purple Pact, women's issues and race

We zetten steeds sterker in op de operationalisering van het Paarse Pact (feministische economie), de visie waarbinnen de Vrouwenraad haar werking uitbouwt. […] de zogenaamde Cinderella tables. Het gaat om een reeks van rondetafels/reportages die onder een gekozen 'brand' plaatsvinden. De eerste rondetafel zou een kick off kunnen zijn van een hele serie. Het draait om visie- en conceptontwikkeling en alle mogelijke aanbevelingen op diverse terreinen, kaderend binnen de vele huidige maatschappelijke uitdagingen (zorg voor de planeet en de mens, economie versus politiek, flexibilisering en digitalisering van arbeid, collectief versus individu, onderdrukkende machtsverhoudingen (racisme, seksisme, homo- en transfobie, validisme, xenofobie, extremisme,…) (Vrouwenraad, 2022b, p. 9).[36]

Stated challenges: "the many current social challenges (planetary and human concerns, economy versus politics, labour flexibilities and digitisation, collective versus individual, oppressive power relations (racism, sexism, homo- and transphobia, validism, xenophobia, extremism,...)" (Vrouwenraad, 2022b, p. 9, own translation). Stated solution: "We are increasingly committed to the operationalization of the Purple Pact (feminist economy), the vision within which the Women's Council builds its operation. […] the so-called Cinderella tables. These are a series of round tables/reports that take place under a chosen 'brand'" (Vrouwenraad, 2022b, p. 9). A fundamental pillar within the Purple Pact is the feminist care economy; an economy in which caring for each other both – human, animal and planet – is central and where gender equality becomes the norm (Vrouwenraad, 2019). A pertinent question that can be asked here is how does a women's movement that has deliberately excluded Black women for decades, and whose exclusionary mechanisms still powerfully reverberate, relate to the care of those same women within their movement?[37]

Alice Walker argues that a care economy must be viewed through both the lens of Blackness and femininity simultaneously in order to address Black women's experiences (Walter Lotens, 2021). Another element to take into account is, which voices are heard while making decisions

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[36] Ambition 3: supporting the transition towards a caring society
[37] This question needs nuance as to why the Vrouwenraad is being equated to White feminism see chapter 5.3 on intersections to illuminate the colonial history of the Vrouwenraad

on climate? According to Osman (RoSa vzw, 2022), the discussions and debates in Belgium about climate change is mostly held between academics and the middle class, being able to address climate issues is currently a privilege. Allowing Black women to participate in climate decision-making is necessary to understand the demands of Black women within climate policy. Because preconceptions may be repeated even by those who believe they are "familiar with the realities of Black women" (Collins, 2000, p. 329).

As demonstrated by the theoretical framework indigenous cultures have long prioritized respect for one another, animals, and the environment, within the ideology of the African tradition of Ubuntu[38]. Indigenous social systems are based on horizontal dynamics, which holds that everyone and everything is interconnected and that treating people, animals, and the environment with respect is therefore equally vital (Dirk Holemans, Marie-Monique Franssen & Philsan Osman, 2021). Unlike western traditions where humans are considered superior to animals and planet with all the climate consequences that entails. But also, where one human being considers himself superior to another based on historically Western dichotomies such as men being superior to women, heterosexuals being superior to homosexuals, and White people being superior to Black people with again, all the consequences such as inequality dynamics that perpetuate sexism, racism, misogynoir, homophobia and discrimination (Mignolo & Escobar, 2013; Bertolt, 2018; Tamale, 2020).

Camille Badoux (1974) asserts the term "ecofeminism" to French feminists. Tamale (2020) argues that principles found within ecofeminism was strongly influenced by native African customs and practices. Ecofeminism holds that gender inequality and environmental concerns are closely related; yet, it has come under fire for treating women as a homogenous group and assuming that all women suffer from the same forms of social oppression (Tamale, 2020). The Purple Pact can be subjected to the same criticism, even if it does promote an intersectional strategy. If we look at the section below found in the Purple Pact on page 8:

Feministisch economisch onderzoek tracht niet alleen de vrouwenvraagstukken binnen de economie te onderzoeken, maar ook zaken die vele andere groepen mensen bezighouden, dit

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[38] Tamale (2020, p. xv) describes Ubuntu as follows: "An African traditional ideology of justice and fairness based on the philosophies of humanness, communitarianism, solidarity and interdependence".

door expliciet rekening te houden met leeftijd, sekse, beperking, mogelijkheden, ras, klasse en andere factoren (Vrouwenraad, 2019, p. 8).

Both an ideological and power-dynamic frame can be identified here: within this paragraph the term *vrouwenvraagstukken* is a compound word in Dutch, combining the word *women* and *issues* into a single term – women's issues. In the text the term *women* is put in front of *issues* to talk about women's issues and the issues that deal with age, gender, (dis)ability, race and class are described as issues *that concern many other groups of people*. Are these issues then no longer about women or are those *group of people* no longer considered as women? The way this paragraph is constructed implies that women's issues only refer to women who fit within – in this case an implicit – normative framework.

This paragraph implies that the normative framework consists of White, middle-class and able-bodied women. It is from this normative framework that the implicit ideology of the Purple Pact allegedly departs. This alleged normative framework enables Whiteness, a category that is unmarked and considered objective and neutral and therefore deemed applicable to all of society. This again suggests that all women experience the same kind of oppression and *the other* groups of people who are impacted by age, gender, disability, class, race and other factors are mentioned as an afterthought that should not be forgotten to mention. As if these issues no longer primarily affect women, which they do only not the women who fit in the normative analytical framework from which the lens departs. Referring to someone or a group as the many "others" implies a comparison, because as compared to whom is that group different? "The other" groups of people are being compared to the women – who are White, middle-class, young-middle aged, able-bodied – who belong to the normative framework. The term *women* is put in front of issues to refer to women's issues and as a result putting normative women in the forefront of discussions regarding women's issues and mentioning *the others* and their issues as something that will be added after tackling the issues that concern mainly normative women. Additionally, the language use assessed here contributes to pushing Black women towards the margin. As explained before, language holds power and this use of language supposedly reflects itself in society, feeding into and upholding the marginalised position of Black women in society.

Where does the story start? How far does the Vrouwenraad go back in its history of Belgian feminism? When we analyse their website, we find a tab with the history of the Vrouwenraad as a women's movement. The story starts with the establishment of the first women's movement in Belgium "La Ligue du Droits des Femmes" in 1892 and it ends with explaining how the Vrouwenraad gained its independence as a Dutch-speaking organization in 1979 (Vrouwenraad, 2022a). What is remarkable here is which part of the story is not being told, the history is mainly told from a European perspective. If we look at the feminist history from an African perspective, we see that this same establishment "La Ligue du Droits des Femmes" participated in the civilizing mission in Congo, the female contribution to the civilizing mission abused Black women in Congo in order to gain more citizenship rights for themselves in Belgium. In wanting more rights for themselves colonial women decide to deliberately and consciously infantilize and mistreat Black women (Heyvaert, 2015). How does a movement that profess to stand for and fight for equal rights for women decided to go and oppress other women? Unless they never recognized Black African women as women worthy enough of equal rights. This part of the story belongs to the feminist history of Belgium, the root of the movement is contaminated by colonial attitudes (Bracke, 2005). It would be of utmost importance to include this part of the history as well and not divide the story in ways that is convenient to some. By leaving out this part of the story, one is silencing and negating the existence of the current issues that are particularly pertinent to the experiences of Black women. In order to understand Black African women's hardships, it would be vital to analyse how historical structures impact Black African women's position in today's society. A careful research on the mapping of these historical frameworks of Belgium's Black African women's movement can open ways to discover and analyse leaky pipeline mechanisms that affect the political representation, access to resources, and the overall visibility of Black women of Sub-Saharan ancestry within Belgium's society (Graciela-Malou Dutrieue, 2020; Mimi Thi Nguyen, 2012).

Moreover, in the introduction of the annual plan the Vrouwenraad questions itself by asking a very critical question; *To what extent are attitudes towards the other still determined by a colonial paradigm? (Vrouwenraad, 2022b, p. 3).* They mention attitudes and a colonial paradigm but leave out the colonial history involving their own institution which is a rather paradoxical course of action. Additionally, throughout the entire annual plan there is no analysis

of this pertinent question on a colonial paradigm and the attitudes towards "the other". Furthermore, as evidenced by the existing literature referring to someone or a group as "the other" implies a comparison. It is more than likely that "the other" in this phrase refers to Black women as they also mention a colonial paradigm. To what is "the other" compared? As seen in the literature "the other" is allegedly always compared to the norm, which from a feminist perspective refers to White women.

Example 4: Racism and sexism as distinct analytical categories

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Het draait om visie- en conceptontwikkeling en alle mogelijke aanbevelingen op diverse terreinen, kaderend binnen de vele huidige maatschappelijke uitdagingen (zorg voor de planeet en de mens, economie versus politiek, flexibilisering en digitalisering van arbeid, collectief versus individu, onderdrukkende machtsverhoudingen (racisme, seksisme, homo- en transfobie, validisme, xenofobie, extremisme,...) (Vrouwenraad, 2022b, p. 9)

Lived experiences is a fundamental pillar of recognizing and acknowledging Black women's standpoint within Afro-feminism and Black feminist ideology. Although words such as "racism, sexism, and all forms of violence" are present within the annual plan, these terms appear as categories that are isolated from each other. Meanwhile sexism and racism also occur simultaneously; it is precisely the simultaneity of these two components that makes the experiences of Black women so unique. Furthermore, there is no mention of how these forms of discrimination impacts Black women's lives nor an analysis of what "all forms of violence" entails. A hegemonic discourse where terms and words are only applicable to a particular group of women and where other forms of sexism are overlooked and remain absent is harmful towards the intersecting identities and lived experiences of Black women. When terms and expressions fail to consider the simultaneous nature of the intersectional abuse of sexism and race Black women remain invisible within the text and in society.

As we have seen in example 2 in the omission frame, the National Action Plan for Belgium embedded within the annual plan to implement UN resolution 1325 action directives, lacks consideration for race. In analysing the addressed patriarchal mechanisms, only sexism was examined. This single-axis perspective leads to the exclusion of other manifestations of patriarchy such as misogynoir. This exclusion is concerning, especially considering the disproportionate impact of misogynoir on Black women. While both racism and sexism are

mentioned within the annual plan, the analysis and discussion are predominantly focused on sexism. Within the annual plan the intersection of sexism and other oppressive systems, such as race, were perceived as distinct and thus not simultaneously addressed. This single-axis approach is not only consistent in the National Action plan but also within the discourse of the annual plan, thereby contributing to the under analysis of misogynoir and the unique experiences of Black women.

5   Discussion

According to Black feminist epistemology, three core pillars need to be integrated if the goal is to implement intersectionality as a framework 1) Black women as agents of knowledge 2) lived experiences 3) examining intersections. Firstly, we are going to discuss the underrepresentation of Black women as agents of knowledge within Belgium's society. Secondly, we are going to discuss the omission of the lived experiences of Black women regarding the intersectional abuse of gender and race, within feminist texts and what effect this might have on their lived experiences. Thirdly, this discussion addresses the lack of an intersectional lens when discussing women's issues.

5.1   Black women as agents of knowledge

There is a severe underrepresentation of Black women as agents of knowledge in professional domains in Flanders. For example, Black women are highly underrepresented in academia as scholars, in healthcare as doctors and in politics as parliamentarians. According to the official website of the Flemish Parliament, this parliament counts 124 Flemish deputies, out of all 124 Flemish deputies there is not one Black woman holding a seat (Vlaams parlement, 2023, 3 August). The Federal Parliament is the national parliament of Belgium and it consists of two chambers: The Chamber of Representatives and the Senate, the former counts 150 elected representatives and the latter counts 60 members (Belgische Federale Overheidsdiensten, 2023, 3 August). Out of in total 210 members of the Federal Parliament, there is not one Black woman present. In order to systemically enable the presence of women in political legislative and executive bodies Belgium has implemented a gender quota to ensure gender equality since 1999 (Instituut voor de gelijkheid van vrouwen en mannen, 2015). If gender quota was put in place to make women's presence systemically accessible within politics then why do Black women remain systemically invisible? Are Black women not women? According to the literature it

appears that Black women are singled out from the societal category of "women" (Coles & Pasek, 2020). Black women are rarely accepted as agents of knowledge due to structural mechanisms uphold and constructed by Whiteness. The racialization process for Black women and White women were fundamentally different. The racialization process for White women made them inferior to White men, White women's oppression was solely based on sex. For Black women, the racialisation process meant they suffered racial inferiority (because of the absence of a White skin colour) and gender oppression. Oyěwùmí (1997, p. 122) states that within society colonial forces determined racialized societal categories going from White European men on top, under them White European women, under White European women, native Black men and then you have the remaining "Other" a category that is consciously left unspecified which served as a sign that Sub-Saharan women did not belong within society. The ostracization ("othering") process excluded Black women from the two-part sex binary, this ensured that Black women were not perceived as "women" within society. As a result, Black women are excluded in gender equality conversations. When having conversations about gender equality the conversations are predominantly about White women being equal to the opposite gender (Tamale, 2020). And this may be part of the reason why a gender quota is mainly beneficial to include the presence of White women but it does little for the inclusion of Black women.

In the analysis of this study we introduced four frames in which Black women are either excluded or in risk of becoming so. These racialized societal categories are reflected in society within a power-dynamic frame. In our analysis, we discovered a homogenisation of race within executive power spaces. This homogenisation of race was apparent in the organisational core structure of the Vrouwenraad as well as in the development of the National Action Plan for Belgium. The appealing rhetoric surrounding equality and inclusion from institutional spaces where advocating for women's rights and equal rights is the main goal, are barely or not at all put into practice when it comes to including Black women. This exclusion process ensures that Black women are continued to be pushed to the margins and thus fail to gain executive power in society (Heyvaert, 2016, p. 296).

5.2 Lived experiences

To grasp the severity of the systemic underrepresentation of Black women not being perceived as agents of knowledge, we need to acknowledge Belgium's full colonial history. While White women in Belgium were gaining rights and their feminism was gaining traction, White feminists were abusing, infantilizing Black women and treating them as literal animals in a human zoo (Bracke, 2005; Daniel Boffey, 2018). Feminists in Belgium have long been complicit in upholding colonial rhetoric towards Black women (De wereld morgen, 2013). Upon until this day colonial discourse is upheld through silence and (un)consciously perpetuating attitudes of coloniality towards "the other". This silence can be attributed to the omission frame, the annual plan as well as the embedded documents found within the annual plan such as the Purple Pact and the National Action Plan failed to address the simultaneous nature of the intersection of gender and race. We have examined in our analysis that there is a great lacuna in their feminist discourse regarding the intersectional abuse of race and gender oppression. Misogynoir was under analysed and not mentioned. Jonsson (2016, p. 58) warns for the erasure of Black women as agents of knowledge which has consequences for feminist politics and its expression in texts. Mohanty (1988, p. 63) argues that the silence and under analysis of misogynoir leads to the erasure of Black feminists which results in a "discursive homogenization" of patriarchy which gives a false belief that all women go through the same oppression. Within discourse this false belief leads to creating one-sided solutions to women's problems such as the gender quota. In European feminism, a gender quota is believed to help the representation of women in society, in reality we see that this mainly works for one specific group of women and does little for "the others" (Tamale, 2020). The lived experiences of misogyny that were highlighted in the texts were mainly pertinent to normative women. The lived experiences of misogynoir mostly pertinent to Black women were not present in the texts. This has an impact on Black women's political representation, access to resources and visibility in society.

According to the most recent study carried out on the lived experiences of Congolese, Rwandan and Burundian Belgians by the King Baudouin Foundation, Belgians that are descendants of the former colonies make up the third largest community with roots outside the EU, with in total 110.000 descendants (Robbe Latré, 2017). The study identifies striking structural factors demonstrating the pervasiveness of colonial attitudes in Belgian society. This survey demonstrated that the political interest rate among this group is substantially higher than the

national average, despite this fact Black women are not represented both in the Flemish and Federal Parliament. In contrast to their White counterparts, Black Africans are four times more likely to be unemployed despite 60% of the Black African descendants holding a higher education degree, 56% of them have jobs that are below the level of their degree. For instance, Black African women typically work as nurses or on cleaning teams. Their spouses are forced to work as salespeople or warehouse labourers despite possessing PhDs (Knack, 2017).

This study demonstrates that colonial attitudes still strongly reverberate in society and this has serious ramifications for the lived experiences of Black women in society. What is yet to be understood within mainstream feminism in Belgium is that the inability to include and protect Black women in society will affect all women in the long run including normative women. Seyi Akiwowo (2023, 3rd of August) emphasizes that:

> Despite Black women speaking about this reality for years, not enough has changed - and all too often, Black women's safety is seen as too "niche" to merit funding and support - despite not being niche whatsoever, as an inability to ensure Black women's safety harms all communities […].[39]

Kendall (2020, p. 60) believes that, "ignoring the treatment of the most marginalized women doesn't set a standard that can protect any women. Instead it sets up arbitrary […] goalposts against […] all women […]. That's not freedom […]." It is essential to recognize the significance of acknowledging misogynoir as a crucial aspect of the discourse on women's rights, and striving for a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of the intersectional challenges faced by Black women within the context of the Vrouwenraad's annual plan.

5.3 Intersections

An important aspect of Black feminist theory is the study of intersections. Although intersectionality is mentioned in the Vrouwenraads' annual plan, there are no studies nor analyses of the intersections they identify. For instance, no connection is drawn in the annual plan between the climate – a key tenet of the care economy it promotes – and Belgium's

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[39]Akiwowo, S. (2023, 3 August). Retrieved from https://www.linkedin.com/in/seyiakiwowo/recent-activity/all/

colonial past and present (coloniality) including the effects this has on Black women in Flanders.

As demonstrated through our analysis the lexicon examined throughout the annual plan showed a single-axis approach towards women's issues by perceiving women's issues as analytical distinct categories. Such discourse may be due to an ideological bias rooted within a broader historical and political context. Writer and editor at *Spijker Magazine*[40], Philsan Osman (2022) emphasises that if one does not make thorough intersectional analyses of the issues raised within the women's movement, such as climate change, then one's analysis is fundamentally flawed. In-depth intersectional analyses linking race, gender and class are still heavily underexposed in the annual plan; however, such interconnected analyses are able to identify possible blind spots. As ambition 3 from the policy plan demonstrates, the Vrouwenraad is an advocate of the Purple Pact, a care-centred economy. We previously examined through text analysis that the Purple Pact discourse is allegedly governed by an implicit normative framework. In terms of intersections, women as a community have always been a very diverse group (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2015; Emejulu & Sobande, 2019). As mentioned before a care economy must thus be viewed through both the lens of Blackness and femininity simultaneously in order to address Black women's experiences. But how does a women's movement that was historically focused on singular oppressions implements accessibility to the intersectionality of Black women and the multiple oppressions involved?

To find a sustainable solution to any problem, one must always go back to the root of the problem. Therefore, it is very important to know where the story actually starts. In Europe, when discussing the origin of the climate crisis, the debate frequently begins by pointing out the rise in greenhouse gas emissions due to the industrial revolution. Osman argues (RoSa vzw 2022) that (neo)colonial trade posts and extraction, which caused the map of Africa to be redrawn and reduced to the dominion of Europe and parts of the West, laid the groundwork for the climatic crisis back in the 15th century. Not only were materials transported during the process, but also Africans. Until this day, people of African descent are forced to leave their country due to climate change.

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[40] *Spijker Magazine* is an online feminist magazine who raises topics on gender equality in Belgium

This disrupted the entire ecosystem as well as people in Africa and of African heritage. This has direct and indirect consequences for Sub-Saharan women in Belgium. Those consequences are still greatly underexposed and not studied (enough) to date. To this day, raw materials are still drawn from African countries, for example, cobalt and other minerals from Congo for the production of smartphones (Tamale, 2020). If one does not thoroughly include such contemporary (neo)colonial trade systems in such analyses, then one is left with superficial solutions that perpetuate the marginalised position of Black women in society and encourage negative stereotyping of Sub-Saharan women. According to research, people who come from regions of the world where (neo)colonial capitalism caused – and still is causing – disruption continue to have structural disadvantages such as poverty and this may also be the case for people of Sub-Saharan African descent in Belgium (Jade De Belser Munyaneza, 2019; ENAR, 2021b, p. 25). These populations lack the resources to be the largest polluters due to poverty, yet they are the ones who will most likely suffer the repercussions of climate breakdown[41] first.

Furthermore, another insightful question remains, how far does the Vrouwenraad (un)consciously facilitate and uphold structural inequity mechanisms by not making in-depth studies and tying together intersections such as climate, care, gender, race, and class to challenge the status quo on a national and federal level? Perceiving these factors as analytically distinct and not interconnected may indicate a hegemonic structure which presumably keeps Black women in the margin. The Vrouwenraad must be able to see beyond the requirements of the (White) middle class if they desire to advocate for a structural solution and equitable care for everyone in Flanders' society.

6   Conclusion

To answer the research question: *To what extent does the discourse of the Vrouwenraad's annual plan consider the unique intersection of Black women?*

The analysis reveals an explicit omission in acknowledging the simultaneous nature of sexism and racism, a phenomenon commonly referred to as misogynoir, within the discourse of the

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[41] According to ENAR (2021b, p. 11) "the commonly invoked term 'climate change' is too neutral and does not convey the gravity, urgency and systemic nature of the situation. 'Climate breakdown' better captures the fact that the serious changes in our climate are caused by the (neo)colonial capitalist crisis."

annual plan. Instead, the discourse treats sexism and racism as discrete analytical categories, thereby neglecting to recognize their interwoven manifestation as misogynoir in the lived experiences of Black women.

The research finds that the discourse of the Vrouwenraad's annual plan tends to overlook the complexity and intersectionality of the challenges faced by Black women in terms of gender and racial discrimination. By approaching sexism and racism as separate analytical tools, the discourse falls short in addressing the unique and intersecting oppressions that Black women encounter. As a result, the experiences of Black women remain marginalized and underrepresented in the policy discussions and initiatives put forth by the Vrouwenraad.

Furthermore, the research sheds light on the limited consideration given to the concept of misogynoir within the discourse. While misogynoir is an integral aspect of the experiences of Black women, it is conspicuously absent from the policy agenda and discussions presented in the annual plan. This omission perpetuates the erasure of Black women's voices and experiences, hindering the Vrouwenraad's ability to develop truly inclusive and equitable policies.

The study highlights the importance of adopting an intersectional lens in feminist policy planning and discourse. Acknowledging the simultaneity of sexism and racism as embodied in misogynoir is critical for developing strategies that address the multifaceted nature of gender and racial discrimination experienced by Black women. By recognizing the interconnections between various forms of oppression, the Vrouwenraad can better advocate for policies that are responsive to the diverse realities of all women, including Black women.

On a positive note, the research acknowledges the Vrouwenraad's effort to include women of diverse backgrounds, including Black women and women of colour, in their activities such as workshops and the podcast "Women is present//Work in progress" (Vrouwenraad, 2022b). This inclusive approach is commendable as it fosters an open and welcoming environment that values diversity and promotes dialogue among women from various backgrounds. The Vrouwenraad's commitment to embracing diversity and providing opportunities for women from different walks of life signifies a step towards creating a more inclusive feminist space.

Nonetheless, the study highlights the need for the Vrouwenraad to extend this inclusivity beyond mere participation in activities to encompass positions of executive power and decision-making roles. Empowering Black women and women of colour within the organization's leadership structure can enhance the representativeness and effectiveness of its policies. By doing so, the Vrouwenraad can foster an environment where all women's voices are equally heard, and policies are formulated with a more comprehensive understanding of the intersecting challenges faced by Black women.

In conclusion, the research exposes a significant gap in the discourse of the Vrouwenraad's annual plan concerning the recognition of misogynoir and the unique intersectional experiences of Black women. This study advocates for a more comprehensive and intersectional approach in feminist policy planning to ensure that the voices and experiences of Black women are not only acknowledged but also actively integrated into policy discussions and decision-making processes. Embracing diversity and inclusivity in leadership positions can further strengthen the Vrouwenraad's role as an advocate for a just and equitable society that addresses the complex realities of all women.

7 Limitations

This study acknowledges several limitations and gaps. Firstly, the scarcity of scientific research on the intersectional abuse of sexism and racism posed challenges in accessing alternative epistemologies to validate the experiences of Black women in Belgium. Secondly, employing a critical discourse analysis to examine written texts, the annual plan, and the Vrouwenraad's website served as the principal sources of contextual information for this study. Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize that CDA is not an absolute truth, which renders the findings susceptible to a degree of bias. While the analysis raised pertinent questions, the limited contextual information hindered comprehensive answers. In future endeavors, a combination of CDA and in-depth interviews is recommended to provide a more accurate representation of the lived experiences of both the Vrouwenraad as a feminist institution and Black feminists in Belgium. This approach would yield a more robust and nuanced understanding of the subject matter under investigation.

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9 Appendices

9.1 Appendix 1: Annual plan 2022

JAARPLAN 2022

vrouwenraad

BESLIST FEMINIST

Van 2021 naar 2022

De wereld tracht zich te herschikken na corona. De eerste stappen richting hernieuwde vrijheid zijn gezet, maar alertheid en waakzaamheid blijven nodig. Alertheid, want Covid lijkt er voorlopig nog om te blijven, en we moeten leren leven met die nieuwe aanwezigheid, waakzaamheid omdat een post-Covid maatschappij ook nieuwe uitdagingen met zich meebrengt, alsook gevaren en valkuilen, en dit zowel op individueel als structureel niveau. De weinig gendergerelateerde indicatoren die beschikbaar zijn, bevestigen een grotere impact op vrouwen dan op mannen.

Meer dan ooit leven we in een periode met een ogenschijnlijk diepe kloof tussen mensen en generaties onderling, tussen woke of boomer zijn, tussen arm en rijk, tussen witte mensen en mensen van een andere herkomst, tussen zij die geloven en zij die niet (meer) geloven.

Als Vrouwenraad is het onze opdracht de vinger aan de pols te houden en waar nodig druk uit te oefenen en te lobbyen voor gelijke kansen en gelijke rechten. En bovenal is het onze opdracht als koepelorganisatie om te verbinden, te kijken wat onze gemeenschappelijke belangen en gronden zijn, en te luisteren naar de ander. In dialoog gaan met eenieder en kijken waar we verschillen van elkaar en verwonderd zijn over wat we allemaal gemeen hebben. Sterke netwerken uitbouwen in een nieuw beloftevol jaar waarin corona ons hopelijk niet meer aan banden legt, maar een jaar dat ons in staat stelt om banden te smeden. Hoe we kunnen praten met de ander in plaats van over de ander. En wat daarvoor nodig is, waar we tegenaan botsen als het over die gelijkheid gaat. Hoe kunnen we zorgzaam met elkaar omgaan?

Dit jaarplan doet een poging. Het is een actie- en intentieplan met begrippen als woke, identiteit, inclusie, hybriditeit, enz. De gelijkekansensector staat meer dan ooit voor dwingende uitdagingen. Zijn we inclusief genoeg? Welke uitsluitingsmechanismen zijn er maatschappelijk werkzaam? In hoeverre wordt de houding ten opzichte van de ander nog bepaald door een koloniaal paradigma? Kunnen we de diversiteit omarmen en slagen we erin iedereen te betrekken? De samenleving is meerstemmig, en als Vrouwenraad blijven wij ijveren voor gelijke kansen voor alle vrouwen, samen met mannen en met iedereen die te lijden heeft onder patriarchale mechanismen. Diversiteit maakt deel uit van iedere situatie en van iedere persoonlijkheid en moet niet verheven worden tot een aparte categorie.

We willen met dit plan bekijken hoe we met uiteenlopende acties die inclusie kunnen omarmen i.p.v. ze uit de weg te gaan. Dit hoeft niet ten koste te gaan van onze 'klassieke' thema's waarvoor we steeds zullen ijveren, maar het vereist wel een kritische kijk op de relatie tussen (feministische) geschiedenis, identiteitspolitiek en beleid, zodat we kunnen ijveren voor rechten voor alle vrouwen in verhouding tot de eigen veilige ruimte en belevingswereld.

Onze **ambities** uit het meerjarenplan 2020-2025 blijven behouden: **geweld, stereotypen en zorgzame samenleving**.

Daarnaast willen we de volgende **accenten** leggen in 2022, ons meerjarenplan alsook de maatschappelijke bewegingen indachtig: **jong & divers publiek, vrouwen met achtergrond in migratie, publieke ruimte en de invloed van antifeministische bewegingen op het feminisme**.

.

Ambitie 1   GEWELD OP MEISJES EN VROUWEN BANNEN

Gendergerelateerd geweld is en blijft een groot probleem in onze maatschappij. Elk slachtoffer van dergelijke mishandeling is er één te veel. Daarom blijft de Vrouwenraad volop inzetten op het bestrijden en voorkomen van deze vormen van geweld.

We volgen het eerste evaluatierapport over België door GREVIO (onafhankelijke commissie van experten van de Raad van Europa in) van 2020 op. Deze commissie doet de follow-up van de implementatie van het Verdrag van de Raad van Europa inzake het voorkomen en bestrijden van geweld tegen vrouwen en huiselijk geweld (Verdrag van Istanbul) in de Europese landen. Net zoals in 2021 blijven we de beleidsmakers op Vlaams en federaal niveau interpelleren. Het Vrouwenraad-opvolgingsdocument van 2021 met een stavaza per artikel van het Verdrag vullen we verder aan op basis van wat er in het Nationaal Actieplan Gendergerelateerd geweld 2021-2025 zal staan. In 2021 reageerden we op het Wetsontwerp houdende wijzigingen aan het Strafwetboek met betrekking tot het seksueel strafrecht (DOC 55 2141/001, 19 juli 2021) in de hoorzitting van de Kamercommissie Justitie. In 2022 volgen we de verdere ontwikkelingen op.

De minister van Justitie plant ook een globale hervorming van het strafrecht, het strafprocesrecht en het strafuitvoeringsrecht. Thema's die daar volgens ons in kunnen passen zijn o.a. femicide en daderprogramma's. Waar mogelijk breken we in met onze dossiers in de parlementaire processen om te proberen de aanbevelingen te concretiseren.

Voor slachtoffers van fysiek en online seksueel geweld blijkt het nog steeds niet evident om klacht in te dienen bij de politie. Heel wat mensen durven deze stap niet te zetten. Dat is de conclusie uit de vele verhalen die recent verzameld werden over seksueel geweld via #balancetonbar/meldet.org. Ook de slachtoffers van Bart de Pauw hebben jaren gewacht alvorens zij hun verhaal durfden delen met een vertrouwenspersoon. In 2021 heeft de Vrouwenraad al de eerste stappen gezet om de website www.ikzwijgnietmeer.be opnieuw online te plaatsen en het oorspronkelijke thema 'verkrachting' uit te breiden met getuigenissen over online geweld, seksisme in de openbare ruimte en geboortegeweld. Hoe maken we de online publieke ruimte veiliger voor vrouwen?

De analyse van de getuigenissen zal ons toelaten de bestaande dossiers te actualiseren en bijkomende beleidsaanbevelingen te formuleren met betrekking tot de drempels die mensen ervan weerhouden om klacht in te dienen. Dit initiatief zal verder uitgewerkt worden in 2022 omdat we hierbij meerdere partnerorganisaties willen betrekken in functie van een inclusief eindproduct.

Gendergerelateerd geweld wordt steeds meer erkend als een ernstige uitdaging voor asielzoekers (VIB's: Verzoekers om Internationale Bescherming). De huidige opvangcrisis en de toestand in het algemeen versterken de risicofactoren voor gendergerelateerd geweld op meisjes, vrouwen, en LGBTQIA+ mensen. De Vrouwenraad pleit voor een structurele aanpak van gendergerelateerd geweld in de context van asiel en migratie.
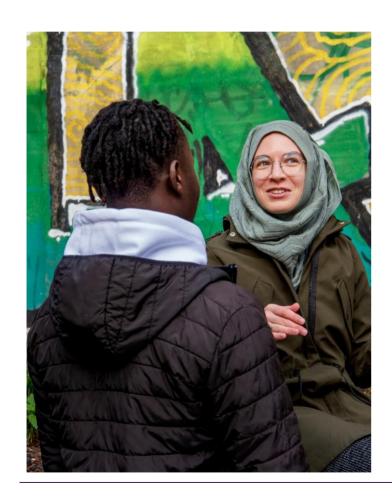
In 2022 willen we samen met vluchtelingen en asielzoekers als ervaringsdeskundigen een sensibiliseringscampagne opzetten rond gendergerelateerd geweld in collectieve opvangcentra. De uitvoering ervan zal met Fedasil en het Rode Kruis besproken worden.

We zullen verder ook nog blijven inzetten op samenwerking met onze leden, andere vrouwenorganisaties en lokale overheden om geweld tegen vrouwen een halt toe te roepen. De Vrouwenraad is al jaren actief tijdens de grote jaarlijkse nationale manifestaties tegen geweld op 25 november, zoals die van het Platform Mirabal en Orange Day van UN Women. Via de website www.gelijkekansengemeente.be worden alle Vlaamse gemeenten actief opgeroepen om mee te werken aan Orange Day en zichtbaarheid te geven aan dit initiatief.

Ambitie 2   STEREOTYPERING EN SEKSISME ZICHTBAAR MAKEN EN BESTRIJDEN

Seksisme blijft alomtegenwoordig, en dit op verschillende niveaus en domeinen. Enkel door in te breken op traditionele patriarchale manieren van kijken, tonen en percipiëren kunnen we ook werken aan het loslaten van gegenderde verwachtings-patronen in verband met rollen en identiteit, en kunnen we vooroordelen en discriminatie aanpakken.

Hiervoor willen we graag een leessalon oprichten en aan de hand van literatuur onderzoeken hoe dit te doorbreken, welke kaders er al bestaan in romans en essays. Ons salon zal openstaan voor eenieder die interesse heeft om samen dieper te graven en kritisch te reflecteren. We zullen daarbij inzetten op werving van jongeren. Graag organiseren we dit op wisselende relevante locaties. Hiervoor schakelen we het lokale netwerk via www.gelijkekansengemeente.be in. We zullen ook trachten een nieuwe doelgroep te bereiken door werving via de openbare bibliotheken, en we nodigen op themagerichte wijze auteurs uit. We denken ook aan een livestream in de bibliotheken.

We ondersteunen de Vlaamse Expertendatabank. In 2022 zullen we inzetten op de rekrutering van experten via onze ledenorganisaties. Ook zullen we extra zichtbaarheid geven aan de databank via onze website en ze waar mogelijk onder de aandacht brengen.

We pikken de draad weer op om onze blog 'Beslist feminist' nieuw leven in te blazen. De bedoeling is om ook hier stevig in te zetten op intersectionaliteit en de diversiteit van het feminisme in beeld te brengen.

Ambitie 3   DE TRANSITIE NAAR EEN ZORGZAME SAMENLEVING ONDERSTEUNEN

We zetten steeds sterker in op de operationalisering van het Paarse Pact (feministische economie), de visie waarbinnen de Vrouwenraad haar werking uitbouwt.

We werken in eerste instantie aan de ontwikkeling van een draagvlak binnen onze koepelorganisatie zelf, als een manier om meer slagkracht en coherentie te ontwikkelen binnen onze werking en die van onze leden, m.a.w. een oefening om de neuzen in dezelfde richting te zetten. In een verdere fase werken we een vertaalstrategie uit voor het grote publiek om een draagvlak te ontwikkelen voor een feministische benadering van de economie in post-corona relance, de zogenaamde Cinderella tables. Het gaat om een reeks van rondetafels/reportages die onder een gekozen 'brand' plaatsvinden. De eerste rondetafel zou een kick off kunnen zijn van een hele serie. Het draait om visie- en conceptontwikkeling en alle mogelijke aanbevelingen op diverse terreinen, kaderend binnen de vele huidige maatschappelijke uitdagingen (zorg voor de planeet en de mens, economie versus politiek, flexibilisering en digitalisering van arbeid, collectief versus individu, onderdrukkende machtsverhoudingen (racisme, seksisme, homo- en transfobie, validisme, xenofobie, extremisme,…).

De minister van Pensioenen stelde in september 2021 de tweede hervormingsfase van de pensioenen voor. De Vrouwenraad publiceerde hierover een nota met bedenkingen en suggesties (minimumpensioen, pensioenbonus, deeltijds pensioen, overgangsuitkering,…) en nam deel aan de debatweek van de pensioenen, georganiseerd door ACV, CM, beweging.net en OKRA. In de derde hervormingsfase zal de focus liggen op de gezinsdimensie en de pensioensplit. Ook daar zullen we op inspelen. In 2022 werken we aan een dossier over deeltijds werk en pensioen. We zullen inzetten op factsheets en infographics. Deze laatste zijn een aandachtspunt dat doorheen onze hele werking loopt.

In 2021 stelden we een dossier op over langdurige afwezigheid omwille van arbeidsongeschiktheid van vrouwen. We organiseren hierover een rondetafel.

De Raad van de Gelijke Kansen voor Mannen en Vrouwen organiseert in februari of maart 2022 een studiedag over het (on)vrijwillig karakter van deeltijdse arbeid om de resultaten van twee door hen bestelde studies bekend te maken: een kwantitatieve door de ULB en een kwalitatieve door het HIVA (KU Leuven). De Vrouwenraad zal hier organisatorisch aan meewerken.

MIRIAM 4.0: we gaan voor verduurzaming en disseminatie van de MIRIAM-trajecten.
Maar liefst 41,3 % van alle eenoudergezinnen leeft net op of onder de armoederisicogrens. Dat is vier keer zoveel ten opzichte van huishoudens met twee volwassenen en twee kinderen. Deze eenoudergezinnen zijn uitgesproken vrouwelijk: het gaat in 8 op de 10 gevallen om alleenstaande moeders met kinderen.

We zetten in op het bereiken van kleinere gemeenten die zich in consortium inschrijven voor MIRIAM waardoor expertise verspreid wordt van grootsteden naar middelgrote en kleine gemeenten. Mogelijke partners: lokale besturen, sociale huizen, scholen, onderzoeksinstellingen, lidorganisaties van de Vrouwenraad en lokale welzijnsschakels.

Uit het pionierswerk van 15 lidorganisaties van de Vrouwenraad die zich in 2021 inzetten tegen menstruatiearmoede door acties op school, via social media en via verzameling en verspreiding van materiaal, trekken we lessen en bouwen we verder aan het welzijn van menstruerende personen. We gaan voor radicale gelijkheid m.b.t. de kosten die menstruatie met zich meebrengt, voor ontkrachting van het dubbele taboe 'armoede en schaamte', en voor de aandacht die menstruatiewelzijn verdient. Om deze redenen, en ook om de transitie naar een zorgzame economie te ondersteunen, neemt de Vrouwenraad dit op in haar jaaractieplan 2022.

In 2022 willen we ook een concreet aanbod uitwerken rond versterking van vrouwen in dakloosheid. Hiervoor zetten we een aantal pilootprojecten op. Een domicilie en een thuis hebben is een onmisbare stap om je sociale, politieke en burgerrechten te kunnen uitoefenen. Zonder woning is het onmogelijk om je te ontwikkelen, werk te zoeken, een burger te zijn... . We willen sensibiliseren voor het perspectief van (jonge) vrouwen in dak- en thuisloosheid, en we gaan hun noden op vlak van gelijke kansen in kaart brengen. We proberen ook waar mogelijk linken te leggen met andere thema's zoals menstruatiearmoede en geweld in opvangcentra. We maken van hieruit de connectie met andere thema's van onze werking. We verkennen op welke manier deze output een plaats kan krijgen op de website www.gelijkekansengemeente.be. We gebruiken onze geijkte verspreidingskanalen om ons doelpubliek op lokaal niveau te bereiken.

Als we ijveren voor een zorgeconomie voor het welzijn van iedereen, dan betekent dit ook dat we mee bouwen aan een zorgzame samenleving voor mens en planeet. Dan betekent dit ook aandacht voor het klimaat, voor duurzame ontwikkeling en voor investeringen in een groene economie. Daarom willen wij in 2022 dit thema m.b.t. de impact op en de rol van vrouwen op de agenda brengen.

Duurzame ontwikkeling is wereldwijd een centraal thema geworden voor de feministische beweging. Het besef dat gendergelijkheid een voorwaarde is voor duurzame ontwikkeling en vice versa is volop in ontwikkeling. Overal ter wereld buigen vrouwenorganisaties zich over kwesties van duurzame sociale, economische en ecologische ontwikkeling en over de genderdimensies ervan. Hiertoe gaan we partnerschappen aan en werken we mee aan initiatieven die hierop inzetten.

We stellen een informatieve nota op over het hoofdthema van de 66ste Zitting van de Commissie Status van de Vrouw: gendergelijkheid en empowerment van vrouwen in de context van klimaatverandering, milieu- en rampenbeleid en programma's. We leveren input en informeren onze leden over de werkzaamheden van de CSW.

We werken mee aan de uitvoering van Agenda 2030 en duurzame ontwikkeling in Vlaanderen.

We maken verder deel uit van het samenwerkingsverband Perspective 2030, volgen de Zitting en de Besluiten op van het High Level Political Forum, het VN toezichtsorgaan m.b.t. de uitvoering van Agenda 2030, en informeren onze leden over deze ontwikkelingen. In 2022 is het hoofdthema van de evaluatiezitting van het HPLF 'Naar een beter en duurzaam herstelbeleid voor de COVID-19 crisis dat uitvoering geeft aan Agenda 2030'. Een van de SDG's (d.i. duurzame ontwikkelingsdoelstelling) waarvoor de vorderingen/knelpunten in 2022 specifiek geëvalueerd worden is SDG 5 over gendergelijkheid en empowerment van vrouwen en meisjes.

Accent 1   Jong & divers publiek

We organiseren al vier jaar op rij het 'Feminist Lab' voor jonge feministen. Vanaf 2021 is het een langer traject geworden, nl. 'The Next Wave Academy' rond sociale en ecologische rechtvaardigheid. De bedoeling van dit traject is om geëngageerde jongeren bij elkaar te brengen om samen na te denken over intersectionele oplossingen voor maatschappelijke uitdagingen en om ook daadwerkelijk iets te doen. Een belangrijke component hierin is in dialoog treden en groepsverbondenheid creëren. We breiden ook de website 'The Next Wave' uit.

De voorbije jaren werd het steeds duidelijker dat we hiermee vooral hoger opgeleide feministen bereiken en dat de drempel vaak nog te hoog is voor meisjes in maatschappelijk kwetsbare posities. Daarom willen we een proefproject opstarten met een organisatie zoals Jong Gent in Actie, om op lokaal niveau te kunnen werken en om te bekijken hoe we ook meisjes in maatschappelijk kwetsbare posities kunnen bereiken. Hiervoor zullen we samenwerken met Ella vzw. Waar mogelijk trachten we de link met ecologie te leggen omdat dit thema meer dan ooit de jongere generatie beroert.

In 2021 werkten we hard aan de inhoudelijke uitwerking van de podcast, een medium dat bij uitstek erg populair is bij 18- tot 35-jarigen, een doelgroep die de Vrouwenraad vandaag in slechts beperkte mate bereikt. Ondertussen zijn podcasts ook in opmars bij oudere generaties. De podcast zal 'W.I.P.' (uitgesproken in het Engels) heten. De afkorting staat voor 'Woman Is Present', een referentie naar de performance 'Artist is Present' van Marina Abramovic, kunstenares, performance artieste en feministe avant la lettre. Daarnaast kan 'W.I.P.' ook gelezen worden als 'Work in Progress', aangezien feminisme en het streven naar sociale rechtvaardigheid nog steeds in progress is. Een groot deel van het voorbereidend werk werd reeds verricht, alsook enkele opnames. In 2022 zetten we in op de follow-up van de podcast met evenementen en gespreksavonden.

We werken vanaf dit jaar samen met Spijker Magazine, een online feministisch magazine dat inzet op een jong en divers lezerspubliek. We doen aan co-redactie en dragen onderwerpen aan voor diverse edities.

Transparantie rond en dialoog met nieuwkomers, zowel asielzoekers als vluchtelingen en migranten, heeft een grote impact op een snelle en effectieve integratie en inburgering. Bovendien dragen de bevordering van dialoog met het publiek en het maatschappelijk debat rond individuele en maatschappelijke kwesties van nieuwkomers bij aan een nieuw discours en nieuwe dynamieken van betrokkenheid en engagement van burgers, nieuw en oud, in co-constructie van een superdiverse samenleving. Los van het feit dat we in andere thema's en acties het aspect nieuwkomers meenemen, willen we in 2022 bijkomende acties ondernemen.

In het verleden organiseerden we samen met lokale vrijwilligers en onze aangesloten verenigingen jarenlang groepswerkingen voor vrouwen in enkele opvangcentra van het Rode Kruis en Fedasil. Mede door corona werden de groepswerkingen stopgezet. De Vrouwenraad tracht deze activiteiten opnieuw op te nemen. Dit om de vinger aan de pols te houden i.v.m. de problemen van vrouwelijke asielzoekers en vluchtelingen. Inhoudelijk zijn de groepswerkingen op uiteenlopende thema's gericht.

We organiseren in 2022 lezingen voor nieuwkomers over 'The History of Her Story' bij de Vlaamse agentschappen Integratie en Inburgering, in NT2 scholen en opvangcentra. We blijven dit ook doen voor het brede publiek, lokale verenigingen en middenveldorganisaties.

'Train the trainer': om onze capaciteit voor de organisatie van de lezingen 'The History of Her Story' uit te bouwen, trachten we zelf enkele veldwerkers op te leiden tot brugfiguren die ook lezingen kunnen geven en groepswerkingen organiseren in de opvangcentra. Dit garandeert de continuïteit van onze veldprojecten en werkt ook emanciperend.

Accent 3   Publieke ruimte

De publieke ruimte wordt vaak door mannen ingericht en ingevuld. Ook dwingt de openbare ruimte ons in genderhokjes in plaats van bestaande ongelijkheden te overbruggen. "Onze omgeving herhaalt bestaande genderrollen niet alleen, maar versterkt ze ook", zegt de Belgische architecte Apolline Vranken. Vrouwen moeten bezit nemen van de materiële openbare ruimte en zelfs van de virtuele publieke ruimte.

Veiligheid voor vrouwen en meisjes speelt hierbij een belangrijke rol. Covid heeft ons tevens het belang van de publieke ruimte duidelijk gemaakt, met name voor die groep mensen die thuis te weinig ruimte hebben.

In onze podcastreeks W.I.P. zullen we een aflevering besteden aan architectuur binnen de openbare ruimte.

We vinden het als Vrouwenraad een logische stap om in 2022 meer aandacht te hebben voor alles wat die publieke ruimte bespeelt, nu meer dan ooit. Zo willen we een ronde tafel houden en een sensibiliseringsactie opzetten met bekende architecten die het belang van een genderinclusieve architectuur (d.i. vrouwen, gender en architectuur) en publieke ruimte in het algemeen benadrukken. Met de resultaten van dit colloquium gaan we in dialoog met de lokale besturen. We delen ze via de website www.gelijkekansengemeente.be.

Accent 4 Antifeministische bewegingen

Sociale media spelen een sleutelrol in de verspreiding van rechts-extremistisch gedachtegoed, waarschuwde veiligheidsdienst OCAD in zijn jaarverslag. De tendens tot verrechtsing gaat vaak hand in hand met onderwerping van de vrouw en gaat bovendien vaak gepaard met het veroordelen van elke identiteit die niet aanleunt bij het 'traditionele waardenpatroon'. Dat in de onderliggende redenering om zich terug te trekken uit het Verdrag van Istanbul met de vinger wordt gewezen naar de LGBTQIA+ gemeenschap, maakt het des te gevaarlijker. Verrechtsing en onderwerping gaan hier hand in hand met het stigmatiseren van bepaalde individuen en groepen van de bevolking. Net daarom is de terugtrekking van Turkije uit het Verdrag van Istanbul niet enkel een aanfluiting van de rechten van vrouwen, maar van de rechten van mensen.

We willen werken rond mythevorming en vooroordelen doorbreken.

Als nieuw rechts aangesproken wordt op zijn vrouwonvriendelijkheid wijzen ze per definitie direct naar andere culturen die volgens hen misogyn zijn. Zij misbruiken hier de 'anderen' om hun eigen antifeminisme te verdoezelen en bovendien instrumentaliseren ze het gelijkekansendiscours om een xenofobe agenda/racistisch discours te verspreiden. Nieuw rechts gruwt immers zelf van alles wat níet te maken heeft met masculiene suprematie. Ergo: ze verklaren de oorlog aan maatschappelijk succesvolle vrouwen, mensen van kleur, homo's, lesbiennes, transpersonen, alle mensen die zich niet duidelijk als vrouw of als man uiten en tevens aan alle niet-traditionele gezinsvormen. Ook aan veganisten, klimaatactivisten en globalisten. De stripfiguur 'Mien De Linkse Trien' ontwierpen ze om online de strijd op te voeren tegenover iedereen die niet terug wil naar de tijd van god, vaderland en eeuwenoude witte tradities (cfr. Family, Tradition and Property).

De Vrouwenraad wil de krachten bundelen om hier tegenin te gaan. We willen overleggen met andere middenveldorganisaties over een mogelijke samenwerking (GRIP, Ella, çavaria…). Ook willen we hierrond samen zitten met het Hannah Arendt-instituut.

Aandachtspunten

We willen in 2022 volop werken aan en rond alle voorgaande zaken, met de volgende aandachtspunten die horizontaal doorheen onze werking lopen.

- Intersectionaliteit

De Vrouwenraad wil gelijkheid voor alle mensen, ongeacht sekse, genderidentiteit of -expressie, leeftijd, afkomst, seksuele oriëntatie, handicap, inkomen, klasse, overtuiging enz. Daarom houden we steeds rekening met alle verschillen die gelijke rechten en kansen van mensen beïnvloeden. De Vrouwenraad hanteert steeds de intersectionele blik en streeft ernaar inclusief te zijn in haar dossiers, acties en beeldvorming.

- Factsheets en infographics

Om onze dossiers duidelijk en to the point voor te stellen, verwerken we onze data in een doeltreffende factsheet. Dit beperkt de overload aan informatie en vat de kern samen in een overzichtelijk verhaal. Ook om bepaalde zaken aan de kaak te stellen zoals prijzengeld vrouwen/mannen in de sport, m/v/x in het bestuur van culturele instellingen, organisaties en media (vrouwen nemen minder invloedrijke posities in en voeren minder vaak beleidsbepalende artistieke functies uit) hanteren we deze tools.

Andere aspecten

van de werking van de Vrouwenraad zullen in 2022 ook behouden blijven:

- Archief

  o Invoering van een digitaal ordeningsplan op de server (conform aan het meerjarenplan, de vzw-wetgeving en de toekomstige digitale archivering). Het is noodzakelijk om het digitaal documentenbeheer aan te passen aan onze specifieke werking binnen het juridisch kader van een vzw (wetgeving met oog op duurzaamheid), aan de verplichtingen naar de subsidiërende overheid en aan het proces van archivering (gezien we op geregelde tijdstippen ons archief overdragen aan het Algemeen Rijksarchief). Net als alle organisaties, instellingen en bedrijven is de Vrouwenraad een archiefvormer. Deze actie moet ook instaan voor de vrijwaring van belangrijk cultureel erfgoed van de vrouwenbeweging in het algemeen en de Vrouwenraad in het bijzonder.

  o Samenbrengen, schonen en ordenen van het papieren archief (1974), ook met het oog op de voorbereidende werkzaamheden van 50 jaar Nederlandstalige Vrouwenraad. Toelichting: de oprichting van twee onderafdelingen (Nationale Vrouwenraad van België - Nederlandstalig Uitvoerend Comité en Conseil National des Femmes Belges - Comité Exécutif Francophone) in 1974 vormde de aanzet voor de formele splitsing van de Vrouwenraad.

- Actua

Naast dit alles is het onze opdracht om doorlopend ad hoc te reageren op de actualiteit, d.w.z. op anomalieën, aankondigingen, maatregelen e.d. die vrouwen in het algemeen benadelen (reageren via PB of opinie, sociale media, korte- of langetermijnactie…), en indien nodig hierrond acties op te zetten.

- Internationaal

Verder volgen we ook van dichtbij op wat er leeft en beweegt op het internationale plan. Om lokaal te kunnen denken en handelen is het steeds van belang om te zien wat er op internationaal vlak leeft, wat de tendensen en beslissingen zijn. Hierover blijven we informeren en sensibiliseren. Het gaat om internationale debatten en besluiten die van groot belang zijn voor de rechten van vrouwen in Vlaanderen. We volgen de ontwikkelingen en het beleid op het niveau van de Europese Unie, de Raad van Europa en de Verenigde Naties en publiceren nieuwsbrieven over onderzoek, data en besluitvorming binnen de EU en de Raad van Europa, m.i.v. informatie over publicaties van Eurofound en EIGE.

- Vrouwen en vrede

Wat betreft vrouwen, vrede en veiligheid (VN-Resolutie 1325) vullen we de digitale brochure verder aan met portretten van vrouwen die vanuit België tijdens de twee wereldoorlogen een bijdrage geleverd hebben als koerier of spion, verpleegster, voedselbedeler enz. Er zijn niet alleen oorlogshelden geweest, maar ook oorlogsheldinnen, zowel bekende als minder bekende. Zij mogen nooit vergeten worden.

Samengevat

wil de Vrouwenraad in 2022 meer dan ooit als koepelorganisatie een drijvende kracht zijn voor dialoog tussen alle vrouwen en het beleid, tussen onze ledenverenigingen en mogelijke nieuwe leden, onder elkaar als team en tussen verschillende netwerken van direct en indirect betrokken actoren. Politieke, maatschappelijke, internationale en culturele invloeden worden meegenomen in onderzoek, besluitvorming en communicatie. Binnen deze verbindende doch kritische sfeer willen wij enerzijds een verbonden verbinder zijn, alsook grondige dossiers aanleggen vanuit expertise. Anderzijds willen we de sociale en maatschappelijke context waarbinnen het beleidsvormende proces zich afspeelt optimaal betrekken en benutten. De kern van onze werking is het ontdekken, stimuleren en uitbreiden van een maatschappelijk denkkader waarbinnen er ruimte is voor alle mensen die mee willen ijveren voor sociale rechtvaardigheid tussen mannen en vrouwen, en bij uitbreiding tussen alle mensen.

Vanuit concrete acties op het veld ontwikkelen we methodieken die onderzoekend en verbindend werken en die we na piloteren in het eigen team afstemmen op inzetbaarheid binnen het brede en steeds groeiende netwerk. De Vrouwenraad zet daarbij de eigen staf in als incubator voor het (door)ontwikkelen van een emanciperend aanbod dat ruimte biedt om harmonie in meerstemmigheid te vinden door in te zetten op dialoog in plaats van op debat.

Vertegenwoordiging

De Vrouwenraad vertegenwoordigt haar leden en de belangen van vrouwen in meerdere instellingen en organisaties op Vlaams, federaal, Europees en internationaal niveau. Dit laat ons toe om het beleid van nabij op te volgen, om mee standpunten te bepalen, om zelf kennis te ontwikkelen en te verspreiden en om te lobbyen met kennis van zaken, om belangrijke ontwikkelingen te signaleren enz.

Internationaal

↔ CSW (VN-Commissie Status van de Vrouw): vergadert jaarlijks in maart in New York – Belgische delegatie – Vrouwenraad geeft input en brieft over de besluiten

↔ ICW (Internationale Vrouwenraad)

Europees

↔ ECICW (Europees Centrum van de Internationale Vrouwenraad)

↔ EU Civil Society Platform on Trafficking in Human Beings

↔ EWL (Europese Vrouwenlobby)

Federaal

↔ Adviesraad Gender en Ontwikkeling (ARGO)

↔ Coalitie Samen tegen Geweld (Verdrag van Istanbul)

↔ Federale Raad voor Duurzame Ontwikkeling (FRDO)

↔ FOD Justitie (commissie Onderhoudsbijdragen)

↔ FOD Financiën (evaluatiecommissie DAVO)

↔ Mirabal (actieplatform)

↔ Perspective 2030

↔ Platform Alimentatie

↔ Platform Abortus (actieplatform)

↔ Platform Recht voor iedereen (actieplatform)

↔ Raad van de Gelijke Kansen voor Mannen en Vrouwen

↔ Steunpunt Armoedebestrijding (voorbereiding tweejaarlijks verslag)

↔ Wereldvrouwenmars (actieplatform)

Vlaams

↔ Departement Kanselarij en Bestuur Vlaanderen

↔ Gelijke Kansen Vlaanderen

↔ Kernoverleg Diversiteit van de VRT

↔ Netwerk tegen Armoede (actieplatform ad hoc)

↔ Platform seksueel grensoverschrijdend gedrag

↔ Platform 'Vrij spel – Kinderen kiezen wel'

↔ Sectorale kamer Gezin en Jongerenwelzijn van de Vlaamse Raadvoor Welzijn, Volksgezondheid en Gezin (WVG)

↔ Taskforce kwetsbare gezinnen (COVID-19)

↔ Vlaamse werkgroepen bevolkingsonderzoek borstkanker en bevolkingsonderzoek baarmoederhalskanker

Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest

↔ Brusselse Raad van de Gelijke Kansen

DE VROUWENRAAD IS DE KOEPELORGANISATIE VOOR (NEDERLANDSTALIGE) VERENIGINGEN DIE WERKEN AAN GELIJKE KANSEN EN RECHTEN VOOR V/M/X IN EEN

Zo vormen we niet alleen het aanspreekpunt voor de overheid, maar bundelen we ook de krachten van onze leden om allemaal samen onze impact te vergroten. Ons uiteindelijke streefdoel is een zorgzame en duurzame maatschappij zonder structurele ongelijkheid. Een feministische economie waarin het welzijn van mensen en het voortbestaan van de planeet de belangrijkste maatstaven zijn. Om structurele ongelijkheid te bestrijden, behartigen en verdedigen we kansen en rechten zoals vastgelegd in de internationale verdragen over vrouwen- en mensenrechten.