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Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies | in Women's and Gender Studies

Dismantling the “Gender-Neutral” Approach to Violence against Women

An Analysis of the Feminist Response to Femicides in the Netherlands

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**MÁSTER ERASMUS MUNDUS
EN ESTUDIOS DE LAS MUJERES Y DEL GÉNERO**

**ERASMUS MUNDUS MASTER'S DEGREE IN WOMEN'S AND GENDER
STUDIES**



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ABSTRACTS

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1. RESUMEN EN ESPAÑOL

Varios movimientos feministas como #NiUnaMas y #MeToo han abordado la prevalencia de la violencia de género en las sociedades heteropatriarcales y su forma más severa, los feminicidios. Si bien muchos gobiernos nacionales e internacionales se han propuesto implementar políticas específicas para combatir esta forma de violencia, en los Países Bajos estos temas no han recibido la atención adecuada dentro del debate público. La falta de un marco legal y el enfoque “género neutro” constituyen obstáculos para el debido enjuiciamiento y documentación de los feminicidios. No obstante, las organizaciones de mujeres han comenzado a solicitar la incorporación de este tipo extremo de violencia de género en el código penal nacional. Por lo tanto, esta tesis tiene como objetivo examinar cómo el movimiento feminista holandés ha abordado y posicionado el tema de la violencia de género, particularmente los feminicidios en los Países Bajos. Analizará y comparará el activismo feminista contra la violencia de género de la segunda mitad del siglo XX y del siglo XXI y valorará sus efectos en la sociedad y la política. Se realizará una extensa revisión bibliográfica sobre violencia de género, feminicidios y activismo feminista contra la violencia de género, estableciendo el marco teórico de esta investigación. Además, esta tesis aplicará métodos de investigación cualitativos. Mediante la realización de entrevistas semiestructuradas con miembros de organizaciones de mujeres de diferentes orígenes, como Nederlandse Vrouwenraad, Feminist Collages Amsterdam y Atria, se pretende obtener un conocimiento profundo sobre la politización actual de la violencia de género. Estas entrevistas brindarán información sobre las estrategias y enfoques actuales utilizados por las organizaciones de mujeres para influir en la agenda pública sobre la violencia de género y en particular, los feminicidios. Además, esta tesis adoptará una perspectiva feminista interseccional para considerar las categorías interseccionales que son constitutivas de la opresión y la violencia contra las mujeres.

2. ENGLISH SUMMARY

Various feminist movements such as #NiUnaMas and #MeToo have addressed the prevalence of gender-based violence within heteropatriarchal societies and its severest form, feminicides. While many national and international governments have aimed to implement specific policies to combat this form of violence, in the Netherlands, these issues have not received adequate attention within the public debate. The lack of legal framework and the “gender-neutral” approach constitute obstacles to the proper prosecution and documentation of feminicides. Nonetheless, women’s organizations have started to petition the incorporation of this extreme type of gender-based violence in the national criminal code. Therefore, this thesis aims to examine how the Dutch feminist movement has addressed and positioned the issue of gender-based violence, particularly feminicides, in the Netherlands. It will analyze and compare the feminist activism against gender-based violence of the second half of the 20th century and the 21st century and assess its effects on society and politics. It will conduct an extensive literature review on gender-based violence, femicides, feminicides, and feminist activism against gender-based violence, establishing the theoretical framework for this research. Furthermore, this thesis will apply qualitative research methods. By conducting semi-structured interviews with members of women’s organizations from different backgrounds, such as the Nederlandse Vrouwenraad, Feminist Collages Amsterdam, and Atria, it aims to obtain in-depth knowledge on the current politicization of gender-based violence. These interviews will provide insights into the current strategies and approaches used by women’s organizations to influence the public agenda on gender-based violence and particularly feminicides. Moreover, this thesis will adopt an intersectional feminist perspective to consider the intersecting categories that are constitutive to oppression and violence against women.

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INTRODUCTION

In the Netherlands, every eight days a woman is killed, usually by her (ex-)partner. This phenomenon has been conceptualized by Radford and Russell (1992) as “femicide” to refer to the violent deaths of women perpetrated by men for gender-based reasons. This concept is intended to capture how women are murdered *because they are women*. This form of violence against women is motivated by hatred, contempt, pleasure, and a sense of ownership over women. Within feminist theory, it has been argued that the asymmetric gendered power relations between men and women result in situations of violence to achieve and maintain women’s subordinate social position (hooks 1984). The gendered nature of violence against women has been considered an intrinsic part of the hegemonic heteropatriarchal gender hierarchy. Although this type of violence can occur in numerous ways, its most extreme form, without a doubt, is the killing of women. The term femicide has since then transformed the feminist discourse throughout the world. In Latin America, this concept has been expanded and transformed into “feminicides” to capture the structural and systemic essence of violence against women, acknowledging the ongoing culture of impunity enjoyed by the male perpetrators (Lagarde 2006). These contributions have continuously challenged the dominant patriarchal order by exposing the normalization of misogyny and gender stereotypes.

Whereas Latin American feminist movements, as well as in other regions of the world, have frequently taken the streets to protest the many feminicides in their countries, in the case of the Netherlands, the concept of femicides/feminicides is still rather unknown. Although the Dutch feminist movement in the 20th century actively aimed to combat violence against women, a topic that has long remained trapped between the walls of the domestic sphere, the turn of the 21st century marked the beginning of the collapse of feminism in the country. The implementation of neoliberal policies in the 1990s led to the disappearance of many women’s organizations that depended on state subsidies, causing the abandonment of the struggle against gender-based violence. In addition, the Dutch government introduced a gender-neutral policy framework that has neglected the gendered nature of violence against women. This shift from a gendered perspective to a gender-neutral approach transformed the Dutch feminist movement and diminished its presence in civil society (Roggeband 2012). However, in the last couple of years, a new interest in gender-based violence has been detected among women’s organization.

Atria, the Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History, started to petition the incorporation of “femicide” in the Criminal Code. Since then, this phenomenon has slowly emerged on the public agenda.

Therefore, this thesis analyzes how the Dutch feminist movements have conceptualized, framed, and addressed gender-based violence against women, in particular feminicides, during the 21st century. It aims to answer the following research question: How has the Dutch feminist movement addressed the issue of gender-based violence, in particular feminicides, in the Netherlands? In order to address this question, this thesis is structured around four sub-questions, including: What has been the role of the Dutch feminist movement in the positioning of the topic of feminicides violence in society?; How have women’s organizations conceptualized the phenomenon of femicide in their discourse?; What are the past and current strategies used by women’s organizations to influence the public agenda on gender-based violence and particularly feminicides? What has been the impact of feminist movements’ activism regarding gender-based violence and feminicides on public policy and society? These questions will support the main objective of this thesis, which is to determine the discourse and approach of the Dutch feminist movement in addressing feminicides in the Netherlands. This research objective has been divided into four sub-objectives: to determine the role of the Dutch feminist movement in the positioning of the topic of feminicides in society; assess the differences and similarities in the approach of the Dutch feminist movement to the politicization of the issue of gender-based violence and feminicides in the 20th and 21st century; analyze the past and current strategies used by feminist organizations to influence the public agenda on gender-based violence and feminicides; and finally to examine the political and social impacts of feminist activism against gender-based violence, and particularly feminicides.

The methodology that has been forged to address these research questions is a qualitative one which consists of six semi-structured interviews with members of Dutch women’s organizations carried out between May 2022 and June 2022. These interviews aimed to obtain in-depth knowledge and insights on the conceptualization of feminicides within the current Dutch feminist discourse and examine the development of feminist activism against this form of gender-based violence against women. The interview questions were structured to examine different elements: the conceptualization of feminicides in the Netherlands by women’s organizations, the influences from the Dutch feminist movement of the 20th century and other international movements, the approaches and strategies that are used by these organizations to

raise awareness and politicize the issue of feminicides, and their achievements as well as the existing obstacles in the fight against this extreme form of gender-based violence against women. The interviews were conducted online using the Zoom Video Communications platform. The interviewees are (former) members of different women's organizations in the Netherlands with different academic and professional backgrounds, such as public policy, healthcare, activism, and international relations. Most of these interviewees are located in urbanized areas such as Amsterdam or The Hague. The interview questions that are included in Annex 1 were used as a guideline, meaning that follow-up questions were asked when clarifications were needed. The duration of the interviews was approximately one hour. Two of the interviews were conducted in English while the other four were carried out in Dutch. The quotes from these interviews have therefore been translated to English for the incorporation in this thesis. Prior to the interviews, informed consent was assured and permission was asked for the recording of the conversation to facilitate the transcription of the interviews for further analysis. The list of interviewees can be found in Annex 2. The data collected from these interviews will provide a deeper understanding of the current discourse, approaches, and objectives of the women's organizations in their struggle against feminicides in the Netherlands. The data assembled via these interviews together with the scholastic literature presented throughout this thesis will be used in tandem to address the main research question.

This thesis will first engage in a critical analysis of the existing academic literature in Chapter 1. This chapter will constitute the theoretical framework that will be applied throughout this thesis. It will explore the concepts of "violence against women" and "gender-based violence", discussing different approaches within feminist theory. Furthermore, it will examine the conceptualizations of "femicide" as well as "feminicide" to refer to the violent killing of women for gender-based reasons, comparing these two terms to establish the terminology that will be employed in this research. Then, it will analyze different forms of feminist activism against gender-based violence and feminicides in the 21st century that will be exemplified by using different international cases. Chapter 2 will provide the contextualization of feminicides in the Netherlands, assessing the past and current legislation and policy framework on violence against women in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. This chapter will discuss, deconstructs, and ultimately critique the implemented gender-neutral approach to violence against women. It will further provide a statistical overview of violence against women and feminicides in the

Netherlands using official databases from the Dutch government as well as the European Union. In addition, it will assess the feminist response and activism to gender-based violence in the 20th century. Chapter 3 will examine how women's organizations in the 21st century have addressed feminicides, analyzing the data collected from the interviews. This chapter considers how the feminist movement has conceptualized and framed the issue of feminicides in its discourse. Then, it will examine the approach and strategies that are used by women's organizations to politicize feminicides. It will also assess the current achievements and obstacles in the struggle against feminicides and overall gender-based violence. In addition, it will address the influence of previous Dutch feminist activism of the 20th century, as well as consider the influences of other international feminist movements, analyzing the positioning of the issue of feminicides in the Dutch context. Finally, the results presented throughout these three chapters will be discussed in the conclusion, formulating an answer to the main research question.

CHAPTER 1

FEMICIDES OR FEMINICIDES? A THEORETICAL APPROACH

Fighting against the violent killing of women has been paramount to the international feminist struggle. Many feminist scholars have theorized the causes and effects of this extreme form of violence against women. This chapter will explore and discuss the different theoretical approaches and assumptions regarding violence against women and specifically focus on the killing of women within heteropatriarchal societies. Section 1.1 will examine the conceptualization of “violence against women” and “gender-based violence” within feminist theory. Then, section 1.2 will discuss the development of the term “femicide” within feminist theory. Section 1.2.1 will explore the conceptualization of “feminicide” by Latin American scholars and examine the similarities and differences between these concepts to determine the terminology that will be used throughout this thesis. Section 1.2.2 will touch upon the relation between feminicides and domestic violence and intimate partner violence. Finally, section 1.3 will analyze feminist activism in the 21st century as a form of resistance against gender-based violence against women and feminicides. In particular, it will examine the use of social media and ‘cyberfeminism’ as part of the activist praxis, exploring feminist movements in different international contexts to provide a comparable basis for the case study of the Netherlands

1.1 Feminist Theory on Gender-Based Violence

The relation between gender and power has been a central point of attention within the feminist debate. Feminist theory conceptualizes ‘gender’ as a social construct that defines and assigns gender roles related to the ‘masculine’ and the ‘feminine’ that translates into power relations between men and women.¹ According to this patriarchal discourse, women are considered the weaker, submissive, and inferior counterpart of men. As Simone de Beauvoir (1949) theorized this phenomenon, women are othered as the ‘second sex’, or gender in this case. The

¹ Critical feminist theory and queer theory criticize the gender binary, the idea that there are only two genders (man/woman) that are inherently distinct. However, for the purpose of this thesis, it will apply a binary focus to simplify the research outcomes while still acknowledging gender-based violence that is directed at non-binary and transgender people.

naturalization and normalization of these dichotomous gender stereotypes result in the establishment of a social gender hierarchy that leads to situations of violence and discrimination against the dominated, women, perpetrated by men, the dominant. Therefore, feminists have assumed that this type of violence is distinct from other types of violence as it is linked to male supremacy and politics of sexism: the belief that men possess the right to control women (hooks 1984). Millett (1970) further referred to this notion as “sexual politics” to allude to the power-structured relationships that subjugate and exploit women and are reproduced through literature, philosophy, psychology, and politics. This social construct is therefore reflected in legislation and policymaking processes. Kelly (1987) explains that although rape has been recognized and defined by law for many centuries, other forms of abuse and violence against women were not acknowledged due to the lacking language of social recognition. The conceptualization of violence against women and its many forms did therefore not occur until the 1970s when the Women’s Liberation Movement started to address the issue and utilized the power of language to advocate for women’s rights and legal reforms. This feminist consciousness-raising provided women with the opportunity to identify and understand the structural and gendered essence of their individual experiences with violence perpetrated by men (Boyle 2019). Therefore, in the 1970s and 1980s, defining and naming types of violence against women gained importance within the feminist movement, academia, and policy development. On the international level, this for example resulted in the establishment of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979. Over the years, these developments have led to many ongoing shifts in language and definitions to accurately capture the nature of these specific forms of violence and generate social recognition (Kelly 2015).

Since then, feminists have identified that violence against women occurs throughout the course of life and in a multiplicity of contexts that go beyond the range of the family/intimate relationships, such as the workplace, schools, the public space, and institutions. Violence against women is characterized by many types of violence that include physical, psychological, sexual, socioeconomic, and emotional violence. Kelly (2015) further stresses that although some forms such as rape, sexual assault, and intimate partner violence are identified as universal to all women, other forms such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation, and honour-based violence are usually associated with the global “South”. Traditional approaches to gender inequality and violence against women have therefore assumed that as gender equality increases, economically, politically, and socially, violence against women will decline

(Ibid.). Nonetheless, Lovett and Kelly (2009) have illustrated in their research about Sweden that violence against women is not limited to “developing countries”.² Although this country is considered one of the most equal countries in the world due to its many policies addressing gender inequality, it also showed one of the highest levels of reported rape per capita in Europe, demonstrating that violence against women occurs when men’s power is challenged (Ibid.).

As violence against women became recognized in many national and international laws and policies, the United Nations elaborated an overarching definition of this term. In 1993, the United Nations (hereinafter referred to as UN) published the first international policy document “UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women”. This document states that:

“the term “violence against women” means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (UN 1993, 2).

The concept of “gender-based violence” is important here as it refers to the notion that violence is directed at a person because of their gender identity. Women are targeted *because they are women*. According to this definition, violence against women is a form or subset of gender-based violence. Although gender-based violence can also be directed at men, it disproportionately affects women. Therefore, violence against women and gender-based violence, while often used interchangeably, are not necessarily synonyms. However, by thinking of violence against women, a concept that emphasizes the experiences of women as survivors/victims of violence, as gender-based violence, another gendered dimension is added that reflects the structural and continuous character of violence against women that explains not only who is targeted but also why (Boyle 2019). Accordingly, Kelly (1987) has addressed this structural nature of violence against women, referring to a ‘continuum of violence’ to identify the multiple, continuous, interrelated, and everyday intrusions that characterize violence against women. In addition, Gill (2011) has illustrated in her research on honour-based violence that there are cross-cultural continuities in terms of gender-based violence against women, debunking the perception that specific cultural values, particularly those of minority cultures within a dominant cultural context, provide these crimes with a unique

² Terms such as “developing”, “underdeveloped”, or “Third World” countries as well as the use of the “Global South” are highly criticized within critical theory and postcolonial feminist thought. These concepts reflect the unrelenting impacts of colonialism and capitalism in the hegemonic world order, placing the colonized populations in a subaltern position.

justification. By applying the idea of a continuum, Gill challenges the “othering” of minority communities and points out the connections between the violence against women due to “honour” related conflicts in minority cultures, and other forms of gender-based violence that are accepted in the dominant culture (Boyle 2019). Furthermore, when referring to violence against women perpetrated by men, the terms “male violence” or “men’s violence” are occasionally used. Nevertheless, ‘men’s violence’ is preferred as it stresses the gendered and socialized aspect of this form of violence that it has no biological premise related to the male sex, as is assumed under the term ‘male violence’. Men’s violence is also used in plural ‘men’s violences’ to acknowledge the plurality of the different expressions of men’s violences (Hearn 1998).

Moreover, Frazer and Hutchings (2020) propose the reframing of gender-based violence as political violence. They argue that one of the major achievements of feminist theory has been to transform political understandings of violence. By rejecting the naturalizing, criminalizing, and moralizing discourses that have been produced to explain and address violence against women, issues such as sexual and domestic violence are now considered intrinsic to patriarchal systems that aim to subordinate women. Nonetheless, although the incorporation of the concepts “violence against women” and “gender-based violence” in policies and research has been crucial for the acknowledgement of violence against women, some feminist critics rather argue that the political responses to ‘violence against women’ in particular, reinforce the binary hierarchy of sexual power relations in which the woman is the mere victim. On the other hand, “gender-based violence” does not fully seem to grasp the complexities of the socially-constructed and organizing nature of ‘gender’ as a form of violence on its own (Frazer & Hutchings 2020). This is related to the overall acceptance of sexism and normalization/naturalization of gender stereotypes, such as the imagined dichotomy between the “aggressive male” and the “passive female”. In the case of sexual gender-based violence, various scholars (e.g. Brownmiller 1975; Burt 1980) have identified how rape myths, defined as prejudicial, false, and stereotyped beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists are used to blame the victim for their own victimization, while simultaneously justifying rape and other forms of gender-based violence. However, shifting the narrative from victim to survivor within the feminist discourse has facilitated an opportunity to reclaim women’s agency in situations of violence (Anitha 2020). Furthermore, other critiques of feminist theory include the overemphasis on the structural levels of gendered power that is considered the patriarchy. This approach, however, has been useful to expand the issue of gender-based violence beyond the

private sphere and relate it to larger social, cultural and structural oppression of women as an overarching group. Nevertheless, this implies that to eradicate violence against women, the entirety of the patriarchy must be eliminated. Moreover, this focus on men's violence is based on heteronormative ideas that reinforce gender stereotypes and exclude violence within same-sex couples. The emphasis on gendered power within feminist theory, therefore, perpetuates the idea of men's disproportionate collective dominance and women's disproportionate violent victimization (Brubaker 2021).

1.2 Gender-Based Murders: Theorizing Femicides

Naturally, the killing of women by men is the most extreme form of violence against women. Nonetheless, the gender-neutral term "homicide" or "female homicide" does not seem to properly capture the essence of these violent deaths. Therefore, various feminist scholars all around the world have conducted research to reframe and redefine this phenomenon. Jane Caputi (1987) addressed "sexualized serial murder" of women in her book *The Age of Sex Crime*. Caputi argues that this type of murder consisting of rape, mutilation and, finally, extermination, have been sensationalized by the fascination with serial killers such as Jack the Ripper, Son of Sam, and the Hillside Strangler. Although the murder of women has been common for as long as patriarchal societies have existed, the 20th century was characterized by a new tradition of sexualized serial murders that have resulted in a mystified ritualistic act within contemporary patriarchy that fuses sex and violence (Monárrez Fragoso 2002). Therefore, this form of extreme gender-based violence against women should be considered a sexually political crime. Caputi (1987) conceptualizes this act as a form of patriarchal terrorism against women. Furthermore, Cameron and Frazer (1987) in their book *The Lust to Kill* further explore the irrationality of the synthesis of sex and violence and the perceived eroticism behind the violent sexual murders of both men and women. They argue that these acts are not only the result of misogyny but also the social construction of masculinity as an inherently superior gender. While the gender of the victim might differ, the gender of the killer is consistent: masculine (Monárrez Fragoso 2002). Cameron and Frazer (1987) conclude that sexual murder is not defined by rape or sexual assault, but by the eroticization of killing. Hence, sexual murder is all murders that are motivated by a "lust to kill", which reproduces the hegemonic social order.

Although these contributions by Caputi, Cameron, and Frazer were the first to properly analyze sexual murders through a gender perspective, it was Diana Russell who introduced the term “femicide” during the first International Tribunal on Crimes against Women in Brussels in 1976. Russell proposed this new concept to raise awareness for the violent murder of women as a separate crime that moved beyond mere homicide. The introduction of the term ‘femicide’ sought to challenge the existing patriarchal order that has allowed and legitimized these deaths (Corradi et al. 2016). Radford and Russell (1992) have conceptualized a phenomenon that has been invisible, normalized, and ignored throughout society. In their book *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing*, Radford (1992) refers to femicide as the misogynous killing of women by men. They argue that femicides serve within patriarchal societies to control women as a “sex class” and maintain the hegemonic gender power relations. They stress the patriarchal tradition of woman/victim-blaming in cases of femicide. Women’s behaviour is measured and scrutinized against men’s idealized construction of femininity. This mythification of the feminine puts in danger all women that “step out of line” or dare to transgress these gender roles. Victim-blaming is therefore a means to restrict women’s access and behaviour in the public sphere. This functions as a reminder that public space is owned by men and women’s presence is conditional on men’s approval. Paradoxically, while according to the patriarchal discourse, women’s place is in the home, Radford and Russell (1992) have denounced the home as the most lethal place for women, in which the men whom they love pose the greatest risk. In 2001, Russell redefined and expanded the term femicide to refer to the killing of women by men *because they are women* (Russell & Harmes 2001), again emphasizing the gendered dimensions of these murders.

Moreover, Radford (1992) states that although men are more frequently murdered than women, it is rarely because they are men, including when women kill men which is usually out of self-defense. Then, what causes or motivates femicides? Caputi and Russell (1992) argue that like rape, femicides are not triggered by frustrated attraction, victim provocation, or uncontrollable biological urges. Instead, femicides committed by husbands, lovers, fathers, acquaintances, or strangers are motivated by hatred, contempt, pleasure, and a sense of ownership over women. Femicides occur in patriarchal societies that are characterized by male dominance and female subordination, which translates into the political construction of masculinity as aggressive and active whereas the social construction of femininity is passive and receptive (Radford 1992), reducing women’s agency. In addition, Radford and Russell (1992) differentiate between various types of femicides, such as racist femicide, homophobic femicide, marital femicide,

femicide committed outside the home by a stranger, serial femicide, and mass femicide. The recognition of these different forms of femicide, and in particular the acknowledgement of the relationship between racism, sexism, and violence (see Davis (1981), hooks (1981; 1984; 1990)), constitutes an important account of the development of intersectionality within feminism, which refers to the different intersecting categories of oppression and violence against women based on race, class, sexuality, etc. (Crenshaw 1991). Prior to 1992, very few authors referred to this specific murder of women for gender-based reasons. Since then, the concept developed throughout academia and politics to address the neglected violent deaths of women.

1.2.1 Differentiating Femicides from Feminicides: Lessons from Latin America

In Latin America, the Mexican feminist scholar and legislator Marcela Lagarde (2006) expanded upon the work of Radford and Russell and proposed the concept of *feminicidio* (feminicide) to refer to the violent killings of women in the Mexican context. In Mexico, the mass killings of women in the northern city of Ciudad Juárez in the 1990s uncovered the normalized and structural gender-based violence against women in the country. Since 1993, hundreds of women and girls in this area have been abducted, tortured, and suffered from a violent death (Monárrez Fragoso 2009). This sparked the necessity for a new conceptualization of this type of murder that addresses both this extreme form of violence against women for gender-based reasons and the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators. The concept of feminicide is based on Radford and Jill's theorization of femicide to distinguish between the mere homicide of women and girls and that as a form of gender-based violence. Nonetheless, Lagarde (2006) extends the definition of femicides to stress the state's responsibility and the lack of accountability. To avoid the translation of femicide into *femicidio*, which would simply imply female homicide, Lagarde proposed "feminicide" instead. The concept of feminicide, therefore, encompasses the violent, and often sexual, murder of women as well as the involvement of the state that has led to the structural and systemic exclusion, marginalization, exploitation, and oppression of women. Lagarde explains that in Mexico, women do often not have access to justice. The absence of proper investigation, victim-blaming, the imposition of obstacles to access the justice system, concealing of information, and the lack of (adequate) prosecution of perpetrators contribute to the continuous impunity and injustice regarding gender-based violence against women (Monárrez Fragoso 2009; Múnevar 2012). Hence,

Lagarde (2006; 2008) considers impunity as an intrinsic element of femicide and also regards femicide as a form of institutional gender-based violence as it perpetuates and normalizes gender inequality and sexist values. This was also stated by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in the sentence of the “Campo Algodonero” case in 2009, condoning the Mexican state responsible for the disappearances and murder of several women in a cotton field in Ciudad Juárez due to lack of investigation, prevention, and obstruction of justice. This case was the first time that the term “femicide” was used and specified in an international court, affirming the state’s responsibility in the reproduction of gender-based violence against women (Fregoso & Bejarano 2010). The term “femicide” thus arose from the insufficiency of the word “femicide” to address the state’s responsibility in favouring impunity for these crimes as well as emphasizing its misogynous nature (Toledo Vásquez 2009). While these terms are often used interchangeably, this thesis advocates for the use of femicide rather than femicide as it stresses the gender-based reasons for these murders as well as the social construction that legitimizes them.

Moreover, the femicides of Ciudad Juárez were situated in the context of neoliberalism that rendered the fast increase in the feminization of cheap labour in the *maquiladora* industry at the US-Mexico border. Therefore, scholars such as Lagarde (2004; 2008; 2010), Monárrez Fragoso (2002; 2009; 2019), Segato (2010), and Wright (2001) have argued that the conditions of material inequality, perpetuated and maintained by the state, victimized the young women and led to their systematic killing and the subsequent culture of impunity (García-Del Moral 2016). Although the term femicide was introduced to refer to the ‘systemic sexual femicide’ (Monárrez Fragoso 2009) in Ciudad Juárez in the 1990s, the conceptualization of femicide allowed other Latin American scholars to examine the specific cases of violent killings in Mexico as well as relate this extreme form of violence to patriarchal culture and the symbolic reproduction of men’s sense of ownership over women’s bodies, legitimizing the devaluation of femininity (García-Del Moral 2016). Accordingly, due to feminist activism and international pressure, femicides/femicides have been criminalized throughout Latin America (with various differences in legislation), inspired by the Belém do Pará Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women in 1994 (Neumann 2022). Nonetheless, Corradi et al. (2016) argue that the criminalization of femicides in Mexico and other countries in the region have not resulted in the eradication of the phenomenon. Even in other ‘non-failed’ states where institutions are strong, “the problem is not impunity, but apparent impotence... Beyond the translation and etymologies, the

underlying issue is the chronicity of the murders as a form of structural violence that manifests itself shamelessly with the systematic killing of women.” (Corradi et al. 2016, 985).

Unlike Latin American countries, feminicides in the European context have not received much attention during the past decades. Therefore, the first reference of the European Parliament to the violent killings of women was as late as 2006, during the hearing on ‘feminicides’ in Mexico and Guatemala. In 2007, the European Parliament adopted a resolution to combat feminicides in Central America (Weil 2016), not addressing the European context. While 2011 marked an important milestone for the Council of Europe when the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, also commonly known as the Istanbul Convention³, was adopted by its member states, it did not include any mention of the term femicide/feminicide. The United Nation’s Vienna Declaration on Femicide (2013) was the first international document that specifically addressed and defined femicide (Weil 2018). Then, which term should be used to refer to the violent killing of women for gender-based reasons in Europe, or for the purpose of this thesis, the Netherlands? Fregoso and Bejarano (2010) advocate for the use of feminicide rather than femicide in their book *Terrorizing Women. Feminicide in the Américas*. Although their work examines feminicides in the Latin American context, they explain that their preference stems from a decolonizing mission in their research and to advance a critical transborder perspective between the global “North” and “South”. By reversing the hierarchies of knowledge they challenge the unidirectional (North-to-South) flows of theory. Fregoso and Bejarano (2010) expand upon the generic definition of femicide as the murder of women *because* they are women (Russell & Harnes 2001) and allude to feminicide as the murder of women due to gender power structures and as a form of gender-based violence that is both public and private, meaning that the state as well as individual perpetrators are involved;

“it thus encompasses systematic, widespread, and everyday interpersonal violence... Feminicide is systemic violence rooted in social, political, economic, and cultural inequalities. In this sense, the focus of our analysis is not just on gender but also on the intersection of gender dynamics with the cruelties of racism and economic injustices in local as well as global contexts” (Fregoso & Bejarano 2010, 5).

³ As Turkey decided to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, this name appears controversial and should be exclusively referred to as the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this thesis, the name “Istanbul Convention” will continue to be applied as this remains commonly used within the Netherlands.

Therefore, this thesis proposes the use of feminicide instead of femicide. Although femicide is the most common term used within the current Dutch feminist movement, apart from *vrouwenmoord* (translated as ‘the murder of women’), using feminicide would challenge normalized eurocentrism and tackle the issue from a more deep-rooted patriarchal source that includes both the public and private sphere. Feminicide acknowledges the structural and systemic nature of gender-based violence against women that has been naturalized and legitimized by the state as well as individually. It would further provide a much-needed intersectional perspective that has often been neglected by White/Western feminism. Despite the different national and regional contexts in terms of socio-economic conditions, crime, and legal provisions, women in Europe and the Netherlands share the same terrorization by patriarchal violence as do women in Latin America. As this thesis will demonstrate, in the Netherlands, this form of gender-based violence has been disregarded and underestimated.

1.2.2 Beyond Domestic Violence and Intimate Partner Violence

In many national contexts, particularly in those that do not have a specific legal framework for feminicides, the documentation of the killing of women is usually regarded as interrelated to domestic violence and/or intimate partner violence, restricting its definition to the private sphere. Feminist scholars such as Susan Schechter have studied the prevalence of violence against women perpetrated by men within the family sphere. Schechter (1982) argues that this type of violence is rooted in male domination as the ideology of male supremacy is manifested and reinforced by institutions, sexist divisions of labour, and economic systems in all capitalist societies. bell hooks (1984) further explains that while male domination is the premise of the issue, this type of intrafamilial violence is intrinsically connected to all acts of violence that are the result of hegemonic social hierarchies. This is important to consider when discussing and using the term feminicides rather than femicides, as it refers to sexism in society as a whole and translates into political structures that normalize and reinforce misogyny.

As previously mentioned, in the 1970s and 1980s naming and defining the different forms of violence against women became an important topic on the political agenda and led to many shifts in language. In the 1970s domestic violence was referred to as “battering”, calling victimized women “battered women”. However, this definition merely focused on physical violence. Therefore, the term “domestic violence” or “domestic abuse” replaced this term. Stark (2009) argues that men’s physical abuse of women is intertwined with coercive control,

isolation, and intimidation, which implies that individual actions cannot be separated from the broader context in which they occur and must be understood as a long-lasting pattern of behaviours. Thus, referring to Kelly's (1989) conceptualization of the 'continuum of violence' (Boyle 2019). Nevertheless, domestic abuse and violence do not seem to properly grasp the violence committed by intimate partners as it fuses all violence between family members. This led to the introduction of the term 'intimate partner violence' to specifically refer to violence in a partner relationship (Kelly 2015). Although the latter specifies the type of relationship between the victim and the perpetrator of violence, whereas domestic violence does not include this in its definition, both of these terms are gender neutral (Boyle 2019). Therefore, by using these terms in cases of violence against women perpetrated by men, including feminicides, the gendered nature of the crime is unaccounted for and the patriarchal subordination of women remains unrecognized due to the trivialization of men's violence against women.

Nonetheless, research has illustrated that feminicides are often perpetrated within partner or family relationships (e.g. Dobash & Dobash 2015). This phenomenon has resulted in the conceptualization of 'intimate partner homicide' or 'intimate partner femicide'. Again, the use of homicide in this context omits the gendered nature of the crime. This type of femicide is defined as the killing of women by their intimate, or ex-, partner. This extreme and fatal form of gender-based violence is related to and characterized by patterns of domestic abuse, coercive control, and stalking (Campbell 1992; McFarlane et al. 1999; Stark 2009). hooks argues that intimate partner violence specifically is "one of the most blatant expressions of the use of abusive force to maintain domination and control. It epitomizes the actualization of the concepts of hierarchal rule and coercive authority" (hooks 1984, 120). This form of gender-based violence is one of the most accepted and condoned in patriarchal societies. hooks further distinguishes between patriarchal rule in the precapitalist world and the context of advanced capitalist society. Whereas men had complete dominance over women in their families in precapitalist societies, the development of the capitalist nation-state threatened their authority and power as society and all its individuals came under the control of the economic needs of the capitalist system. This loss of power and capitalist exploitation in the public sphere resulted in the belief that exercising control and dominance in the private sphere would restore their power and, hence, their masculinity. Therefore, by allowing and perpetuating women's subordination in the home, ruling male capitalists prevented rebellion on the job. This has been further reinforced by the entry of women into the workforce, which has reduced men's power and control over women even more. The use of violence against women has thus become a tool

to maintain hegemonic gender hierarchies (hooks 1984). However, as previously discussed, the definition and understanding of femicide/feminicide should not be limited to this relational characteristic as it eliminates the importance of the structural and systemic nature of the issue that goes beyond the private and individual level. Femicides are not limited to the private sphere, nor intimate partner relationships.

1.3 Feminist Activism against Gender-Based Violence and Femicides

Feminist activism against violence against women started in the 1970s. This period of activism occurred on multiple levels: local, national, and international. This collective push has led to the creation of various international declarations, policies, and conferences that have aimed to protect women's rights (Homan et al. 2018). The naming and defining of the various forms of violence against women has been key to this era of feminism. Their activism has raised awareness on a normalized issue as they emphasized the failure of state agencies to support and protect women in situations of violence. Nonetheless, as suggested by bell hooks (1984), the feminist movement in the 20th century traditionally focused on men's violence, which reinforced certain sexist gender stereotypes that portray all men as violent and aggressive while depicting women as passive victims. Consequently, hooks points out that both men and women have maintained the existing gender hierarchies by perpetuating the idea that the dominant group can exert coercive authority over the dominated, ignoring the fact that women are also capable of committing violence against other dominated groups, including other marginalized women.

Therefore, feminist movements in the 21st century have aimed to apply an intersectional perspective to gender-based violence against women. This concept was first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, derived from Afro-American feminist thought, to differentiate the violence and discrimination experienced by black women in the United States. Intersectionality refers to the intersecting categories that are constitutive of oppression and inequality, such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, class, and age (Crenshaw 1991). The Afro-American feminist movement criticized hegemonic Western feminism for their assumed neutrality and universality as this feminism is merely based on the dominant group of women: white, heterosexual, middle class, Christian, etc. White feminists' essentialist idea of "the feminine", based on their generalized experiences, reduces women's subordination to patriarchal oppression, excluding other realities and diminishing other factors of oppression. Therefore,

the concept of intersectionality allows to extend and deepen the scope of feminist thought regarding the inequalities experienced within the category of “women” that have generated alternate lived realities of submission and domination (La Barbera 2016).

Feminist activism in the 21st century further expanded upon the work of the feminists from the previous decades. This feminist activism has been focused on the violent killing of women, identified as the most extreme form of gender-based violence. The term femicide/feminicide has therefore served as a mobilizing force all around the world and transformed public awareness regarding this phenomenon (Belotti et al. 2021). Social media has become an essential element in the development of feminist movements. The beginning of the 21st century has been characterized by the early versions of ‘cyberfeminism’ that sought to spread their message through e-zines and blogs. The advancement of technology allowed the creative appropriation of online activism through social media combined with traditional activist tools such as demonstrations, strikes, and pamphlets (Willem & Tortajada 2020). In addition, cyberfeminism has become an inclusive and intersectional tool that allows the diffusion of the voices of women from different sexualities, race, ethnicities, social classes, ages, etc. In particular ‘hashtag activism’, the use of hashtags in social media posts, has emerged as “an effective way to share information and spur action about a demographic that seems to get little support from its nation” (Williams 2015, 342). Hence, it functions as a multi-layered space that includes marginalized and silenced women (Willem & Tortajada 2020). In the United States, Twitter has become the main tool for Black feminists to share information that is not covered by hegemonic media sources, or White feminism, regarding the effects of the intersecting categories of race and gender in terms of violence against women. It, therefore, functions as a space for resistance (Williams 2015). In Spain, the creation of online platforms/communities/collectives, such as *Red feminista*, dedicated to the eradication of violence against women have been important for Spanish feminist cyberactivism, taking its offline counterpart as its basis for the mobilization of political actions, lobbying, support for survivors/victims, and the integration from different perspectives (Nuñez Puente 2011). Cyberfeminism and hashtag activism/feminism, acknowledging its limitations and challenges, increase the accessibility of the feminist debate on violence against women and generate widespread interest by “popularizing” feminism (Kangere et al. 2017).

This type of feminist activism has been particularly important in the feminist struggle against feminicides in Latin America. The feminicides in Ciudad Juárez, as well as the high levels of impunity, provoked the rise of a new period of feminist activism in Mexico and the rest of

Latin America. In 2001, the Mexican state became the target for transnational activism under the slogan “Alto a la Impunidad: Ni Una Muerta Más!” (Stop Impunity: Not One more Woman Murdered!) (García-Del Moral 2016). From this moment onwards, feminist activists throughout Latin America have used this term in their fight against feminicides (Fregoso & Bejarano 2010). The slogan “Ni Una Más” resurged in its adapted form in 2015 when the Argentinian feminist movement mobilized under the slogan of “NiUnaMenos” (NotOneLess) as a response to the violent death of a pregnant fourteen-year-old girl. Digital spaces and social media played a crucial part in the organization and diffusion of the movement in Argentina and beyond. The hashtag #NiUnaMenos went viral on Facebook and Twitter, and became a model for movements thereafter, such as #VivasNosQueremos (#WeWantUsAlive) in 2016, #BastaDeViolenciaMachista (#StopMachistaViolence) in 2017 and #AbortoLegal (#LegalAbortion) in 2018 (Piatti-Crocker 2013). “#NiUnaMenos and its complementary hashtags adapted the initial movement into new identities and contexts throughout Latin America but shared similar goals and strategies” (Ibid., 13). While initial debates focused on feminicides, impunity, and the overall violence against women, the debate gradually shifted and became more heterogeneous. It started to include other intertwined political issues such as sexual and reproductive rights, prostitution, the gender pay gap, etc. This transformation further fostered the implementation of different political practices within the movement and combined multiple communication strategies, such as social media activism, marches, radio broadcasting, public readings, etc. By 2017, the #NiUnaMenos movement had become a decentralized and international movement that fights for the eradication of violence and discrimination against women (Belotti et al. 2021). However, in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic reduced the number of #NiUnaMenos protests as well as the marches for International Women’s Day on the 8th of March. The resulting economic crises led to social unrest, instability, and greater inequality, causing protests during the second half of 2020. In addition, the pandemic led to increased levels of violence against women throughout the region as the stay-at-home policies confined the victimized women in their houses with their abusers (Legal Empowerment Network et al. 2021). The unprecedented levels of gender-based violence and feminicides resulted in protests and activism, both online and in the streets, despite the restrictive COVID-19 policies (Piatti-Crocker 2021).

Another important movement against gender-based violence was the #MeToo movement that started in 2017 in the United States. This is another example of international hashtag feminism that has digitally united women from all around the world. The hashtag was inspired by the

#BeenRapedNeverReported hashtag that trended in 2014. Both hashtags have been used by women and girls to share personal stories of sexual violence. Mendes et al. (2018) have argued that the solidarity that is generated by these types of online communities transforms into a feminist consciousness among the participants that allows them to comprehend sexual violence as a form of structural violence rather than an individual or personal issue. Nonetheless, despite the new opportunities for feminism generated by the advancements in technology, certain drawbacks form challenges to the effectiveness of cyberfeminism. Social media platforms are also used to disseminate misogynous messages under the name of “men’s rights groups” that aim to defy popular feminist projects (Willem & Tortajada 2020). Therefore, feminism has to coexist with digital misogyny. This can be described as the patriarchal codes, structures, and discourses that circulate online (Banet-Weiser & Miltner 2016). In addition, digital technologies can also deepen inequalities based on gender, race, sexuality, and class. “Corporatization, white supremacy, and heteronormative and male-dominated interventions in our technological spaces and tools seem to have long buried utopian dreams of an emancipatory technological world” (Shokooh Valle 2021, 623-624). Although cyberfeminism aims to interrupt and subvert the flows masculinity and patriarchal discourse on the web (Núñez Puente et al. 2021), feminist scholars have also identified the dangers of online gender-based violence against women, attacking women for being women, and online misogyny that mainly consist of sexual attacks (Jane 2017; Levey 2018; Vickery & Everbach 2018).

CHAPTER 2

UNCOVERING FEMINICIDES IN THE NETHERLANDS

The violent killing of women in the Netherlands, as well as other expressions of gender-based violence, has remained at the margin of academic and political interest. Although this country is often praised for its “tolerant” and “progressive” image, sexism and misogyny obstruct the way to achieving gender equality. In comparison with other EU member states, the Netherlands seems to be lacking a gender-based approach to violence against women. Therefore, this chapter will explore the topic of feminicides in the Dutch context. Section 2.1 will examine the transformation of Dutch legislation on violence against women by comparing the policy framework of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. It will address the current legislation strategy and address the “gender-neutral” approach that has been adopted by the Dutch government to deal with violence against women. Then, section 2.2 will provide an overview of current statistics on violence against women, including feminicides, and will compare this to other European countries. This section will also briefly address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic regarding gender-based violence. Finally, section 2.3 will analyze the response and activism of the Dutch feminist movement towards violence against women by assessing feminist activism in the 20th century. Chapter 3 will examine the women’s movement against violence and femicide in the 21st century.

2.1 Dutch Legislation on Violence against Women: The “Gender-Neutrality” Issue

Before addressing the Dutch context, it is important to point out that within the European context violence against women is framed differently within every country. Although the European Union strives for political unity, there is no coherent policy on violence against women in the region. The aforementioned Istanbul Convention (2011) does offer some agreement between the member states, but there is no legally binding approach to combating violence against women in Europe. Apart from state responsiveness, it is important to consider the policy frame as these frames indicate how the issue of violence against women is understood, how it is positioned in society, and how it should be resolved. This focus on policy

frames further reflects whether the cultural transformation objectives of the feminist movement have reached the political agenda and policy development process. For instance, if the issue of violence against women is framed as a security or housing issue, women's shelter organizations might obtain more funding (Roggeband 2012). Hence, how violence against women is institutionalized and addressed by state and non-governmental organizations reflects how the issue is understood in society. Then, in the case of the Netherlands, the 1980s marked a period in which specific policies on violence against women were developed. In 1982, the left-wing Dutch government invited feminist activists to contribute to the policy-making process and the development of particular goals to tackle the issue. The proposed plan adopted a feminist perspective on violence against women that identifies this form of violence as the result of unequal power relations between men and women that have been maintained due to structural inequalities. This policy plan focused on the eradication of 'sexual violence against women' (Hearn et al. 2016). This plan further highlighted the prevalence of sexual violence in the private sphere; an issue that has been politicized as 'women's abuse' by feminist social workers since 1974 after opening a shelter for victimized women. The succeeding right-wing government adopted the feminist policy plan and issued the first national policy on sexual violence against women and girls (Roggeband 2012). This policy defined the issue as a gendered problem by identifying women's abuse as "one-sided use of physical and/or sexual force against the will of the woman by her male (ex)partner" (Dutch Department of Social Affairs 1984, 7). The focus on women's constitutional right to protection, physical integrity, and right to sexual self-determination allowed the issue to transgress the boundaries of the private sphere and become a public matter. The recognition by the state of the structural nature of violence against women as related to women's unequal social position legitimized state intervention. The policy plan incorporated a feminist approach that consisted of measures such as consciousness-raising, police training, and sex-specific care services. The only legal measure, which was already in place, was the possibility to keep the perpetrator away from the victim (Roggeband 2012).

Nevertheless, the end of the 1980s marked a change in policy regime due to the implementation of neoliberal policies and the privatization of the healthcare system under the right-wing government, reducing financial support for victim support services created by women's organizations. This led to the regression of the women's movement against violence in the 1990s (Roggeband 2012). While during the mid-1990s a new "purple" coalition was formed between the Labour Party and the two governing Liberal parties, excluding for the first time

the Christian Democrats, the emphasis of their style of government was the functioning and efficiency of the market, despite the progressive approach to ethical issues (Outshoorn & Oldersma 2007). Their discourse was developed from a “gender-neutral” perspective, framing any distinction between men and women as discriminatory (Outshoorn 2002). Therefore, this implied the shift from a gendered perspective that was introduced in the 1980s to address (sexual) violence against women, to a gender-neutral perspective that neglected the gendered mechanisms of violence. This affected the aforementioned sex-specific services for women organized by women’s organizations due to the implemented austerity measures (Roggeband 2012). Although the 1990s did mark an important moment for the Dutch feminist movement when marital rape was defined as a crime in 1991, which had been a central point of the feminist struggle since the 1980s, arguing for the sexual self-determination of women, the government in the 1990s disregarded their gender-specific approach and instead reframed the issue as the “protection of vulnerable subjects” during the legal reform (Lünneman 1996). The two policy plans published in the 1990s on violence against women framed the issue as a public health issue that required a mainstream approach rather than a gender-specific perspective. In addition, this gender-neutral approach further entailed the reorganization of policy responsibility for the violence issue, causing a shift from the gender equality unit within the Department of Social Affairs and Employment to the Department of Welfare, Public Health and Culture (Roggeband 2002). Moreover, the new policy plan issued in 1990 highlighted the role and treatment of the perpetrator as part of the prevention plan. Nevertheless, whereas the previous policy plan incorporated initiatives for the empowerment of (potential) victims to prevent violence from occurring, this was neglected in the new proposal. It did, however, include the penalization of marital rape, improving police services and the registration of domestic violence, and the inclusion of sex-specific services in the mainstream healthcare system. Nonetheless, paradoxically, this implied the loss in funding for many private women’s organizations, terminating services such as rape crisis centers and hotlines (Roggeband 2012).

Then, while the Netherlands has often declared itself a pioneer in terms of gender equality as it was one of the first European countries to implement specific policies to combat violence against women (Ibid.), the 21st century marked a change in policy development on domestic violence that entailed potential negative effects for women, losing its leadership position within the European context. The legislation on violence against women in the 21st century was preceded by the new gender equality plan that was published in 1999. This plan was inspired by the 1995 Beijing UN World Conference on Women and the 1997 Resolution of the

European Parliament on violence against women (Ibid.). Nevertheless, the Dutch “purple” government did not adopt the gendered perspective that was promoted during these important international events. Instead, the Dutch government further transformed its policy framework on violence against women using again a gender-neutral approach, restricting the definition of violence against women by using the term “domestic violence” (Althoff et al. 2021). In this policy plan, both the perpetrator and victim are addressed in gender-neutral terms while the potential victimization of boys and men is emphasized. The plan framed the issue of violence as a coordination issue rather than the result of asymmetric gendered power relations, as was concluded in the 1984 policy plan. Therefore, this new plan proposed policy measures focused on research, public information campaigns, and enhancing professional expertise, eliminating the original feminist analysis from the public agenda (Roggeband 2012). Nonetheless, as previously discussed, the use of the concept of “domestic violence” implies all forms of violence within the private sphere that goes beyond intimate partner violence. Its definition includes violence perpetrated by all members of a household or family without considering gendered power dynamics.

The turn of the century required the creation of another action plan to combat violence. The interdepartmental policy plan “Private Violence: A Public Matter” was published in 2002. This plan continued to “degender” the issue of domestic violence by including men and boys as potential victims, omitting the gendered distribution between the victimized and the perpetrators, and conceptualizing domestic violence as a gender-neutral issue. Hence, the Netherlands continued to enforce a “sex neutral” approach, as the Dutch government has labelled its discourse, to address violence, eliminating ‘violence against women’ entirely from its vocabulary. The plan, coordinated by the Ministry of Justice, does not examine the relation to gender inequality and merely defines domestic violence as a security issue. This framework, therefore, connects violence to citizenship as it stresses the government’s responsibility to secure the safety of each citizen. This entailed the switch in focus from assistance and protection of victims to the punishment of perpetrators (Ibid.). This approach has received many criticisms as it neglects the indispensable relation between gender and violence (Althoff et al. 2021). In 2007, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) criticized the gender-neutral approach to violence against women, which encouraged the government to revise the existing policy plan. In 2008, a new plan was published. Although this plan did acknowledge the fact that the vast majority of the victims of

domestic violence are women, it did not include any gender-specific measures to combat this form of violence (Roggeband 2012).

Later policy plans continued this tradition of gender-neutrality in relation to violence. For example, in 2013 the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science conducted a “gender scan” to assess the gender sensitivity of the Dutch policies on domestic violence. This report concluded that the “sex-neutral” approach of the Dutch government does not take into account the gender-related factors of domestic and/or intimate partner violence. This resulted in a gender toolkit for municipalities and professionals to incorporate gender as a component of their policy plans while maintaining their neutrality approach (de Vaan et al. 2013; Daru et al. 2016). Moreover, in the year 2018, a new policy plan was introduced called “Violence does not belong at home” (“*Geweld hoort nergens thuis*”) in order to combat domestic violence and child abuse. However, women are not mentioned as a specific vulnerable group within the action programme, neglecting the gendered nature of violence against women. Hence, while attempts have been made to increase the “gender sensitivity” of the policies on domestic violence, no particular references have been made to the determinant role of gender in the interventions (Althoff et al. 2021).

“While the Netherlands have comprehensive policy plans for dealing with various forms of violence, there is no integral legislation covering all forms of violence against women. Dutch policy-making on violence is fragmented, predominantly ‘soft’ and degendered. ‘Degendered’ here means the practice of using ostensibly non-gendered terms to denote categories known to be gendered” (Hearn et al. 2016, 556).

The gender-neutrality approach to violence has thus become a prominent issue in the Dutch policy framework. Moreover, besides the lack of “gender sensitivity”, it has obtained a racialized and culturalized character. In an attempt to be more “inclusive” and “intersectional”, the different policy plans mention several ethnic minority groups to identify the intersecting inequalities based on gender, ethnicity, and race. In particular, Islam-related ethnicities that have been previously ignored under the notion of cultural relativism/ethnocentrism, are now singled out. This hyper-visibility of gender and ethnicity entails that ethnicized-racialized-gendered actors in society are considered the “problem”, whereas the dominant majority and “privileged” group remains “innocent”. Ethnic minorities are considered a separate group that is responsible for its own problems. The policy framework labels certain forms of violence against women as culturally specific, such as honour-based violence, female genital mutilation, and forced marriage. Therefore, while the policies attempt to address the undeniable presence

of violence against women within these minority communities, a matter that does often require state intervention to guarantee the rights and freedoms of these women, it rather stigmatizes and ‘others’ minority women (Roggeband & Verloo 2007; Hearn et al. 2016). In Dutch society, these women are labelled as “allochthonous”, which identifies people that are not “originally” Dutch, in contrast to people who are “autochthonous”. Although this label seems suited for migrants, it is mostly used for people with a non-western migration background, especially those of Turkish and Moroccan descent, reinforcing the negative and stigmatizing stereotypes of these marginalized groups. These women are excluded from the category of “Dutch women”, even if they have the Dutch nationality or were born in the Netherlands (Roggeband & Verloo 2007). Hence, whereas the overall implemented policies on violence against women are degendered, the “intersectional” policies that address domestic violence against migrant women are gendered, creating the false impression that violence against women as gender-based is inherent to “non-Dutch” cultural groups and does not occur among the “autochthonous” community. According to this narrative, violence against Dutch women is considered an individual incident, while violence against women from a non-western migration background is regarded as a cultural issue. Nevertheless, data shows that in 2017, 68.1% of the perpetrators of domestic violence were born in the Netherlands (CBS 2022). In addition, the policies on violence against women do not mention any other intersectional categories, such as class or sexuality, that contribute to the prevalence of violence against women (Hearn et al. 2016). Hence,

“these policies are embedded into processes of neoliberal governance in which individual responsibilities are prioritized over structural factors underlying domestic violence, such as gender inequality and poverty. As a consequence, these policy interventions have had a negligible effect on reducing violence against women, particularly poor women, and have been especially harmful to those with a migration background” (Mellaard & van Meijl 2021, 438).

Moreover, the Dutch policies on violence against women are incorporated in the overall crime and justice framework, which means that it is focused on punishing rather than offering support for victims or prevention (Hearn et al. 2016). In terms of femicide/femicide, the Netherlands has not included a definition of this phenomenon in its Criminal Code. Instead, it falls under other provisions of Dutch criminal law, such as ‘manslaughter’, ‘aggravated manslaughter’, and ‘murder’ (EIGE 2021). The killing of women for gender-based reasons is not considered a separate category within the Dutch legislation. The lack of legal framework complicates the proper documentation and registration of the murders as it is unclear whether these cases count

as ‘homicide’ or ‘femicide’. Overall, gender-neutral policies neglect the structural nature of violence that leads to the disappearance of this issue in the policy development process. Instead, this approach results in the individualization of violence. New policies, therefore, have a limited impact and effectively contribute to maintaining the existing gender hierarchy and social order (Mellaard & van Meijl 2021).

2.2 Gender-Based Violence in the Dutch Context: A Statistical Overview

Gender-based violence against women in the Netherlands, as in any other patriarchal society, is an issue that often remains unacknowledged due to the normalization and naturalization of gendered power relations. In addition, its effects are not always explicit or directly visible as this form of violence can be non-physical. Therefore, it can be a useful tool to analyze statistical data to obtain an idea of the prevalence of violence against women. Nonetheless, this type of data usually records reported incidents of violence, not taking into account that due to stereotypes and taboos, many cases of violence remain unreported. Hence, it is important to critically assess the data and its source. Then, the report by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) published in 2014 was one of the primary publications on gender-based violence against women in the European Union. Atria, the Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History, adapted this research and compared its results to Dutch statistical data. According to their report, 45% of all women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lives, 73% have experienced sexual harassment, and at least one out of ten women has experienced rape (Römkens et al. 2014).

Furthermore, in terms of domestic violence, according to a study that was published by the Dutch government in 2019 that examines the prevalence of self-reported victimization and perpetration of domestic violence (ten Boom & Wittebrood 2019), approximately 1 out of 20 adults (5.5%) among the Dutch population (approx. 747,000 people) has suffered from physical and/or sexual violence in the domestic sphere during the past five years. This translates into approximately 6.2% of the women and 4.7% of the men. It is important to mention that approximately 20% of the victims suffered from structural physical and/or sexual domestic violence, meaning that violence occurred daily, weekly, or monthly. In exact numbers, these percentages indicate that approximately 97,000 women and 27,000 men suffered from structural violence. In addition, 56% of domestic violence is perpetrated by a partner or ex-

partner. The report indicates that 3% of the respondents have experienced intimate partner violence. This includes 4% of the women and 2% of the men (van Eijkern et al. 2018). Women are also six times more likely to experience structural violence by their (ex-)partner than men (ten Boom & Wittebrood 2019). Furthermore, in 2017, 90.4% of the perpetrators of overall domestic violence identified as male (CBS 2022).

Nonetheless, the aforementioned report by Römken et al. (2014), based on the FRA report (2014), indicates that approximately 22% of the women in the Netherlands, or 1 out of 5 women, have experienced physical intimate partner violence. This results in about 1,3 million women. The same report further illustrates that the perpetrators of intimate partner violence are usually men. Therefore, the number of female perpetrators of this form of violence is considered statistically insignificant (Römken et al. 2014). Moreover, the same report illustrates that 77% of violence against women committed by non(ex-)partners is perpetrated by men, in comparison to only 16% of violence against women that is perpetrated by other women (Ibid.). The significant discrepancy between this percentage and the percentage mentioned in the 2018 report is explicable due to the difference in methodology, time frame, and definitions of domestic violence and intimate partner violence. For example, the data provided by van Eijkern et al. (2018) on domestic violence includes both sexual and physical violence, whereas the FRA report uses different criteria to measure violence against women and intimate partner violence. The data collection of the Dutch report consisted of an online survey and panel that only examined a period of five years whereas the EU survey was conducted in person. Hence, it is crucial to critically assess the data and reports as they can portray different versions of reality. As both reports do not contain exact numbers but rather provide estimates on the prevalence of domestic/intimate partner violence against women, it is difficult to conclude with certainty how often and in what contexts violence against women occurs in the Netherlands.

For the purpose of further contextualization, it is interesting to compare data on the Netherlands to other European countries in terms of gender-based violence. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has collected data on all EU member states and have combined this into a tool called the 'Gender Equality Index', which measures the progress of gender equality in the EU according to the EU's policy goals. It includes six core domains: work, money, knowledge, time, power, and health. It also has two additional domains: violence against women and intersecting inequalities. A high score on the Gender Equality Index means that a country is close to achieving gender equality. The additional two domains, however, do not

impact the final score for the Index. Unlike the overall Index score, in the domain of violence, the higher the score on a scale from 1 to 100, the more severe the phenomenon of violence against women is (EIGE 2022). Unfortunately, the lack of up-to-date and comparable data from all EU member states, as well as the absence caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2022, have complicated the data collection process. Therefore, the only available score for the violence against women domain is from 2017. This year, the Netherlands was awarded a score of 72.9 on the Gender Equality Index while the EU average was 65.7, implying that the Netherlands is performing well in terms of gender equality. Nonetheless, when focusing on violence against women in the country, a category that is not included in the Index score, the Netherlands received an overall score of 31.5. This is significantly higher than the EU-28 average of 27.2, placing the country in the top ten of EU member states, on the 6th place to be precise, of countries with the highest prevalence of gender-based violence (EIGE 2022).

Regarding data on femicides, due to the fact that there is no legal definition of femicides in the Dutch Criminal Code, it becomes more complicated to properly register and count the number of femicides. Nonetheless, the National Statistics Office (Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek (CBS)) has gathered information on the amount of ‘female homicides’ and those committed by (ex-)partners. The latter could be considered ‘intimate partner femicides’ as discussed in the previous chapter. This generates an idea of the prevalence of femicides in the Netherlands. According to the statistic provided by CBS (2021), the year 2014 accounted for the year with the least amount of femicides since 1996 with 31 murders, of which 16 (51.6%) have been killed by their (ex-)partner. In the period 2014-2020, this number has significantly increased. In 2017, 46 women were killed, of which 18 women (39.1%) were murdered by their (ex-)partner. This percentage is significantly higher than the EU average of approximately 29% of the female victims of intentional homicide that have been killed by their (former) intimate partner (EIGE 2021). In 2018, the total number of femicides “decreased” to 43. However, the number of intimate partner femicides increased to a total of 33 (76.7%) (CBS 2021). Putting this number of femicides into perspective; it indicates that every 8 days, a woman is murdered. Moreover, similar to the overall domestic violence data discussed before, in the period of 2016 to 2020, 56% of the femicides were committed by an (ex-)partner, whereas for men only 4% of the homicides have been committed within the context of an intimate relationship (Ibid.). The data on domestic violence and femicides provided by government institutions, as well as the lack of a legal framework, has undoubtedly been reflected in the implemented policy measures to combat violence. As discussed in section 2.1,

the Dutch government has introduced a gender-neutral approach to violence, offering limited support and attention to victimized women, ignoring the prevalence of femicides, and neglecting the indisputable presence of gender inequality in the country. The “gender-neutralization” of public policies on violence against women suggests that gender equality has been achieved; meaning that men and women are equal according to the law (Römkens 2016). However, numbers show that there is still a long way to go. Statistics and data can be easily manipulated for political purposes. The Netherlands has always tried to maintain its “progressive” and “tolerant” image. Nonetheless, international reports and non-governmental reports have clearly illustrated that violence against women, as well as its most extreme form, constitutes an important issue in the country and requires more research, resources, and attention.

Moreover, globally, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused social and economic turmoil. In terms of violence against women, the pandemic has had rather negative effects. As previously mentioned, the implemented quarantine measures confined women to the domestic sphere, trapped with their abusers. The United Nations has concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a drastic increase in the amount of violence against women, especially in the domestic sphere, denouncing this as a ‘Shadow Pandemic’ amidst the COVID-19 crisis (UN Women 2021). Nonetheless, in June 2020, the Dutch government published an article stating that although internationally domestic violence rates had increased during the first months of the lockdown, in the Netherlands this had not occurred (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport 2020). A study conducted by Coomans et al. (2021) on the “registered” cases of domestic violence in 2020, illustrated that the amount of domestic violence compared to 2019 did not significantly increase nor decrease as a result of the COVID-19 measures during or after the first lockdown. In the Netherlands, the organization *Veilig Thuis* (Safe at Home) is a national network with 26 regional organizations where people can report domestic violence. This study analyzed the data collected by *Veilig Thuis*. From this data, it has been concluded that there were no significant changes in the amount of reported and registered cases of domestic violence. Nonetheless, there was a switch in the people who report domestic violence, as this was primarily neighbours, and there was a slight increase in the relative share of intimate partner violence, which is comprehensible due to the stay-at-home measures (Ibid.).

Although these conclusions counteract the expected global increase in domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to state that these numbers do not indicate in any way that there in fact has been less domestic violence. Many cases might have gone

unreported in the official records due to the pandemic measures. As is illustrated by CBS (2019) in the report on domestic violence and child abuse, the majority of the cases registered at *Veilig Thuis* were reported by the police (61%) or by strangers/unknown (8%), and not by the victims/survivors themselves. Hence, it is understandable that there were fewer reported cases during the lockdown due to the quarantine. This does not indicate that there was less violence against women. In addition, as previously mentioned these reports do not specifically focus on women's experiences, nor do they consider gendered power relations as a source of violence. The gender-neutral approach leads to a dangerous underestimation of the prevalence of gender-based violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic. The perceived trend in domestic violence in 2020 might be a mere result of increased obstacles in terms of reporting opportunities and the reduced social contact between family members, friends, and acquaintances. Furthermore, as discussed in the previous chapter, violence against women is often normalized and is therefore difficult to acknowledge. In particular intimate partner violence, as this is still regarded as a private matter that does not permit outsider intervention. Moreover, most survivors do not primarily seek support from the police or *Veilig Thuis* but rather from their informal support network. Therefore, official data provided by government institutions portray an underrepresentation of the actual situation of domestic violence (van Gelder et al. 2021). In terms of femicide, in the year 2020, 44 women have been killed, of which 24 have been murdered by their (ex-)partner (54.5%) (CBS 2021). More research is needed to properly comprehend the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on violence against women, as the available data is limited to the year 2020.

2.3 The Dutch Feminist Struggle against Violence against Women in the 20th Century

The Dutch feminist movement started to address (sexual) violence against women in the 1970s, an issue that before this period was considered strictly a private matter. As previously mentioned, the issue of domestic violence and sexual violence was politicized by feminist social workers, conceptualized as 'women's abuse' (*vrouwenmishandeling*). They opened the first women's shelter in Amsterdam for victimized women in 1974. This initiative has been repeated throughout the Netherlands, creating an extensive national network of women's shelters called "*Blijf van mijn lijf*" ("Don't touch my body") (Roggeband 2012). The organization considered women's abuse as a structural social issue instead of an individual-

psychological problem. They adopted the dominant feminist discourse, concluding that violence against women is caused by asymmetrical power relations between men and women (Roggeband 2002a). In 1976, the network achieved to receive state funding (Roggeband 2012). This was something that had been contested before as the organization aimed to maintain its independence through the facilitation of non-governmental resources, such as volunteers, donations, and other services (Roggeband 2002a). The establishment of these shelters demonstrated the dangers for women within intimate partner relationships. “It was no longer the unknown man in the bushes, but boyfriends and partners who represented the biggest threat to women” (Grünell 1999, 343). In addition, at the end of the 1970s, women’s studies had finally made its debut in academia. Women’s experiences with violence had become a topic of interest, as well as the overall consequences of patriarchal heterosexual relationships (Römkens 1986). The rise of the Dutch women’s movement against violence was also inspired by the international women’s movement of the 1970s. In particular, English women’s organizations such as Chiswick Women’s Aid influenced the discourse of *Blijf van mijn lijf* (Roggeband 2002a). In the beginning of the 1980s, the Dutch government invited *Blijf van mijn lijf*, as well as other women’s organizations, to contribute to their policy plans on female empowerment (Roggeband 2002b). Particularly, the year 1982 marked an important moment for Dutch feminism as the secretary of state Hedy d’Ancona, a feminist and social democrat, organized a “study conference” on violence against women. The Kijkduin Conference positioned the issue of sexual and physical violence as a form of structural violence against women, calling upon the government to take action and include this topic in its equal opportunities policy (*emancipatiebeleid*). d’Ancona argued that this is a matter of economic and sexual dominance that is intertwined with the realization of self-determination rights (Acker & Rawie 1982).

This conference, hence, established a new definition of violence against women in the Dutch context in terms of its structural nature and government responsibility from a feminist perspective. It further acknowledged the gaps in knowledge and vocabulary. This historic event indicated the start of a new era for policy development throughout the 1980s, aimed at support, prevention, research, and public information on sexual violence (Grünell 1999). This period of the leftist government facilitated the women’s movement by providing them with subsidies. This generated new opportunities for professionalization and institutionalization. However, this also implied the heightened dependence on government subsidies and the increasing state influence on the movement. In particular, two factors have been crucial for the mobilization process of the women’s movement and access to the government in the late 1970s and early

1980s: the support of left-wing parties in the politicization of “women’s issues” and the informal strategy of subsidization by subsequent governments that has converted the movement into an institutionalized and professional movement (Roggeband 2002a). Therefore, Roggeband (Ibid.) has referred to this period as the “subsidized revolution” of the Dutch women’s movement in the 1980s. Organizations such as *Blijf van mijn* received public funding, but the fear of being encapsulated by the government seemed a pressing matter. Their activism can be characterized by confrontational forms of political and social action. Yet, receiving government funding for their activism makes their activism questionable. Nevertheless, despite the significant role of the government and its informal facilitation, integration, and cooptation strategy, the overall women’s movement did achieve to maintain part of their independence and opposing character.

In 1983, the government published a preliminary plan to combat sexual violence against women and girls, acknowledging both the issue itself and the state’s responsibility to address the issue. They incorporated the feminist analysis provided by the women’s movement. However, as discussed in section 2.1, during the late 1980s’ neoliberal turn, the Dutch government decided to decentralize the women’s shelters and cut their funding as stated in the 1984 policy plan. Therefore, while recognizing the structural nature of sexual violence and regarding the issue of national importance, the contradictory approach caused more tensions between the women’s movement and the state (Roggeband 2002b). During the late 1980s, advancements in women’s studies further illustrated that while the initial feminist response argued that every woman is a potential victim of physical and/or sexual abuse, it did not address why certain women are more likely to become victimized. Therefore, the feminist patriarchal analysis of violence against women needed to be revised (Grünell 1999). For *Blijf van mijn lijf*, this period caused internal turmoil due to the budget cuts, making it difficult to focus on political actions besides its social work. In addition, it becomes increasingly challenging to find volunteers for their shelters due to the decreasing attention for the women’s movement as “second-wave feminism” has dialed down, and more women turn to paid employment rather than volunteering. The organization is forced to switch to paid employment, professionalization, and a hierarchical organizational structure, which had been a point of resistance for many years. This meant the end of *Blijf van mijn lijf* as an activist group. Many activists and women’s shelters decide to renounce as a form of protest against the encapsulation by the government (Roggeband 2002a).

Another group within the Dutch women's movement focused on rape as its main point of action. Different groups are formed such as *Vrouwen Tegen Verkrachting* (Women against Rape), *Vrouwen Tegen Seksueel Geweld* (Women against Sexual Violence), and *Tegen Haar Wil* (Against Her Will). This movement also started in Amsterdam in the late 1970s and was soon disseminated throughout the country. The movement considered pornography as an underlying source of sexual violence against women, forming another group called *Vrouwen tegen Porno* (Women against Porn). These groups offered different support services to women that suffered from sexual violence. In contrast to the aforementioned women's movement against women's abuse, the relationship with the state is not determined by the subsidization, positioning the state as the "facilitator" of their activism, but rather by the legislative struggle on rape, sexual assault, and later pornography, positioning the state as an "objective". In the 1970s, the politicization of sexual violence becomes important in the development of the women's movement as a primary actor in the political debate on the legislation on sexual violence (Roggeband 2002a). In the 1980s, these women's organizations against rape receives sporadic subsidies that are used for phone costs or rent, resulting in a different, less dependent and problematic relationship with the government compared to the *Blijf van mijn lijf* organization. The struggle against sexual violence received support from both left-wing and right-wing parties, in particular from female members of parliament. Sex, or gender, thus played an important role in the development of the policy plan that was published in 1984, and for the criminalization of marital rape in 1990 (Ibid.). In addition, in the 1990s, defining sex work as work also became an intrinsic part of the feminist agenda (Zeegers & Althoff 2015).

Nonetheless, after almost two decades of feminist struggle against (sexual) violence, in the second half of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the Dutch women's movement loses almost all of its influence in the political debate due to lack of government funding and absence of continuity within the movement. Its strong political position and mobilization opportunities that were initially facilitated by the government as part of the dominant integration strategy becomes the source of the women's movement's downfall in the late 1980s. Therefore, most women's activist groups cease to exist in the early 1990s (Roggeband 2002a). Hence, Outshoorn (2002) argues that from this period onwards, one cannot speak of "the" women's movement, but rather of a couple of professionally functioning interest groups. Moreover, while the different women's organizations have strong ties with other non-governmental organizations or labour unions, as was the case for the movement against sexual harassment that started in the 1980s, there was no active participation of the different feminist groups in

political parties (Roggeband 2002a). The resistance against government encapsulation has proven to be a critical aspect of the movement's discourse on autonomy and independence. Nonetheless, it could be argued that this has created many missed opportunities for the movement's development in the following decades.

With the implementation of the new policy plan for gender equality in 1999, the Dutch government introduced a gender-neutral approach to violence against women. This entailed the emphasis on domestic violence rather than gender-based violence as the main form of violence against women and men. This policy plan was influenced by the hegemonic neoliberal discourse of this era, resulting in cuts in funding and subsidies for women's organizations. Nonetheless, despite eliminating feminist demands from the policy agenda, the implementation of these policy measures did not receive much resistance. As Roggeband (2012) points out, the network of women's organizations against violence had almost disappeared due to this neoliberal regime. At the beginning of the 21st century, the previous insights of the Dutch women's movement have been often disregarded as "self-victimization" under the gender-neutral narrative. This flawed discourse does not consider the structural obstacles that impede gender equality and ignores other forms of social injustice to justify the branding of the Dutch identity as *geëmancipeerd* (emancipated) (Römkens 2016). Domestic violence is no longer considered intertwined with gender power relations unless violence against women among ethnic minorities is addressed. The existence of gender inequality in the Netherlands has been often contested due to the increased emancipation of women during the past decades. This has caused the decreasing support for feminism and the Dutch women's movement. At the same time, the nuclear family returned to the center of regulation, policy intervention, and governance, limiting the recognition of gender inequality and the discrimination against women. The recognition of violence against women is therefore considered a threat to the supposedly achieved gender equality (Römkens 2010). Hence, despite the fact that many women's organizations of the 20th century no longer exist, does this mean the end of Dutch feminism in the 21st century? Has there been a revival of the feminist struggle against gender-based violence? Has violence against women become de-politicized? This development of the women's movement against (sexual) violence and the incorporation of the term femicide/femicide in the 21st century will be extensively examined in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

BREAKING THE SILENCE: FEMINIST ACTIVISM AGAINST FEMINICIDES IN THE NETHERLANDS

This chapter provides an analysis of the current Dutch feminist movement and its response to gender-based violence against women, particularly feminicides, in the 21st century. It will examine and evaluate its impact and significance in regards to the main research question: How has the Dutch feminist movement addressed the issue of gender-based violence, in particular feminicides, in the Netherlands? It will first analyze how the feminist movement has conceptualized and framed the issue of feminicides in its discourse in section 3.1. Section 3.2 will examine the approach and strategies that are used by women's organizations to politicize feminicides and influence the public opinion. Section 3.3 will address the influence of previous Dutch feminist activism of the 20th century, as well as consider the influences of other international feminist movements, to assess the positioning of the issue of feminicides in the Dutch context. This will be followed by an analysis of the current achievements and obstacles in the struggle against feminicides and overall gender-based violence in section 3.4.

3.1 Conceptualizing Feminicides in the Netherlands

Although the phenomenon is not new, the conceptualization of feminicides in the Netherlands has only been recently addressed by certain women's organizations. First of all, Atria, the Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History, which is the main and practically only organization that addresses feminicides in the Netherlands, has opted for the term "femicide" rather than "feminicide". While this term has been introduced by Russell in the 1970s and was further conceptualized by Radford and Russell in the 1990s, this concept appears to be rather unknown in the Netherlands and has only recently been proposed by Atria in 2021 in the Netherlands when they published their petition for the incorporation of this crime in the Criminal Code. One of the respondents who is employed at this specific organization explained that:

“Femicide in itself is of course a whole new term and violence against women is something that has been used in feminism for some time, but often it was more in the broad sense of the word... The first publication we were able to find was in 1979 and in the beginning it was often about the rest of the world. In the Netherlands, violence against women was always very private and domestic violence was really something that happened behind closed doors and for which women and feminists had to take to the streets to draw more attention. But femicide has never been as explicit as it has been in the past years... That is part of the idea that it has always been a private matter. Men have decided for a long time where the money went, what the important topics are and the *Blijf van mijn lijf* shelters only came to the Netherlands in the 1970s, when it was about abused women and not necessarily about domestic violence as a whole. Those terms have been adapted each time to “avoid” attacking the man, especially in the beginning. So then you are not talking about domestic violence, which is also a very strange broad term, and “murder of a woman” may have preceded “femicide”, but they are actually all broad terms that do not make the link to a woman being murdered because of her gender, which is the motive” (B. Myren, interview with the author 2022).

This confirms the idea that the prevalence of feminicides has been ignored in the national context. By referring to domestic violence rather than gender-based violence or even violence against women, the Dutch government has neglected the gendered and structured nature of this form of violence. Although in the rest of the world the work of Radford and Russell has been rather influential, the Netherlands seems to be falling behind in incorporating these specific gendered concepts into its national vocabulary. This has perpetuated the supposed privateness of violence against women. Furthermore, it is important to mention that many Dutch women’s organizations that have been approached during this research explained that they do not focus on feminicides. Some organizations instead rather focus on overall violence against women or specifically on sexual violence, which has become an important point on the public agenda in the Netherlands. Therefore, the lack of expertise and awareness has caused the low participation rate during the interview process. One of the respondents from the *Nederlandse Vrouwenraad (NVR)* (Dutch Women’s Council) stated that:

“At one point Atria set up a petition, which we also distributed and signed within our network and we fully support it, but our project from the national coordination is somewhat broader, so specifically on violence against women. The fact that physical violence sometimes leads to femicide is part of that... We from the NVR propagate that a gender lens should be included in the policy and approach and that is not yet done everywhere... Of course steps have also been taken by the government... But what we now see is that people often still refer to domestic violence and domestic violence is also a term that does not include the gender dynamics and

the gender roles that influence it and there is nothing domestic about domestic violence” (A. Huits, interview with author 2022).

This reflects the deep-rooted gender-neutrality that has been promoted by the state as it has been adopted by the very same organizations that originally counteracted this approach in the previous decades. The obsolescence of the feminist movement as a result of the elimination of women’s organizations in the 1990s has clearly resonated with the Dutch feminist movement in the 21st century. In addition, all interviewees referred to Atria as the main actor in terms of the national context. The issue here is that Atria is primarily a research institute. This implies that they conduct both independent research as well as for the Dutch government. Although Atria has introduced various campaigns and published several reports on gender-based violence, its dependence on government funding restricts its potential social impact. The results might be used in the policy making process but does not immediately reach the population. Therefore, several interviewees questioned the existence of a “feminist movement/discourse” in the Netherlands.

“What and where is the feminist discourse in the Netherlands? That is an important question because in my opinion there is a discourse within the universities in the Netherlands, but that is detached from almost any social movements or the Dutch foreign policy... What is the feminist discourse in the Netherlands? I would not know where to look for that. You have a niche group that is on the leftist anarchist radical side. There is a small discourse there but those are marginal numbers. Then you have the mainstream discourse within the ministries...I do not see anything except Atria, commissioned by the ministry. What I see are texts coming from Latin America because that is where feminicides and NiUnaMenos are strong. And you have quite a lot of Latinas walking around here in the Netherlands who also do something with that, but that is it” (G. Dütting, interview with the author, 2022).

As argued in Chapter 2, it appears that after the 1990s, the issue of gender-based violence had been removed from the public agenda due to the gender-neutral approach. Feminist organizations diminished due to the cut in funding and did not recover their presence in civil society after the turn of the century. Feminism in the Netherlands had changed into a neoliberal version that primarily focuses on the economic emancipation of women. The national prosperity and overall economic growth of the country have created the false pretenses that the Netherlands does not suffer from gender inequality, or violence against women.

“This first requires you to establish what the current feminist discourse is. I find that difficult to explain because who decides that. And how do you determine what the feminist discourse

is? And if you're talking about the approach to women's abuse here, and I am talking about aid organizations, then the term femicide as a counterpart to homicide, the generic term for murder, and that is the masculine side, is to refer to the 35 women that are still murdered on average per year by their partner/ex-partner and to draw attention to this. Because as in a country like the Netherlands, although it is a very low number compared to other countries in terms of population, it is just a country like the Netherlands with our prosperity and our aid organizations and the structures that are set up for that, it is absurd that we look away at 35 women who are murdered every year and accept that as "well that's a given, it happens, and then we go back to business as usual"... Aside from femicide, the feminist movement has drawn attention to economic equality, the glass ceiling, women in the police force, female professors, and they are all needed. But little attention has been paid to femicide. In recent years, Atria has been one of the few organizations that have addressed this so openly. But then again the question is, who is the feminist movement?" (K. Evertz, interview with the author, 2022).

The fact that it is questioned whether a feminist discourse actually exists in the Netherlands illustrates the negligible presence of the Dutch feminist movement in the 21st century. This quote further exemplifies the limited and problematic conceptualization of femicides. Although Atria does promote the gender-based nature of the issue, it appears that the overall understanding of femicide is often considered the female counterpart of homicide, the murder of a woman. Hence, omitting the gendered essence of the crime. As there is no original Dutch word for femicide/femicide, or gender for that matter, the same problem arises that has been identified by Lagarde (2006) with the translation of femicide into Spanish. Is femicide merely considered a female homicide?

"What we as Atria are very committed to is that awareness of the fact that this is happening is in itself a very big step. It is also a choice in the end, because this alone is apparently already a big step if you see how CBS registers everything, what comes back in the media, how they name things, whether they also extract certain patterns because that does not happen. It always seems to be a kind of loose phenomenon of "oh another woman has been killed again", or not even "again", only "a woman has been murdered or a girl". So it is a loose random murder every time, while it is very clear that certain patterns precede it. And that is of course what we draw attention to and a term is ultimately also a choice and perhaps we are already too late because we are now betting on femicide. Femicide could work just as well in the eyes because there is still work to be done on awareness" (B. Myren, interview with the author, 2022).

Similar to the use of domestic violence rather than gender-based violence or violence against women, the framing of femicide seems to be lacking the structural nature of gendered power

relations that transcend the intimate partner relationships and are reflected in society as a whole. This would already be improved by the adaptation of “femicide” to “feminicide” as this term encompasses the institutionalized and systemic nature of gender-based violence against women that has been normalized and legitimized by the state as well as individually. Nonetheless, there appears to be a more comprehensive discourse among some leftist grassroots feminist organizations. One of the interviewees from Feminist Collages, one of the few feminist activist organizations that also addresses feminicides through “wheat pasting”, explained that:

“The feminist movement is now using the word femicide, which is the killing of women because of her gender. Several members of our group are a bit more radical so the definition can vary. But it is more focused on the direct killing of women and we talked about it a lot with other people in our group who see it more as also indirect killing, because we live in a capitalist system and a patriarchal system where women will get killed everywhere in ways because of her gender” (L. Cleach, interview with the author, 2022).

This framing of feminicides incorporates the indirect killing of women as an intrinsic part of heteropatriarchal capitalist societies. According to this discourse women are not only killed through acts of physical violence but also by merely living in a system that subordinates, discriminates, and marginalizes them due to their gender. Hence, this rhetoric is comparable to the discourse introduced by Latin American feminist movements; it is the entirety of the gendered hierarchical system that condones and naturalizes violence against women in all its forms. Nonetheless, as previously mentioned by one of the interviewees, this discourse is not widely shared among the different women’s organizations and is limited to this radical leftist niche group. Other women’s organizations that are recipients of government subsidies are more inclined to adopt the government-promoted approach and narrative rather than actively challenging the unsatisfactory hegemonic discourse. Furthermore, the results from the interviews further reflect that the phenomenon of feminicide has been conceptualized as something “foreign”, as something that happens to “them”, to migrants. This issue has also been discussed in the previous chapter.

“Honestly, the fact that you can die from gender-based violence is not so high on the political agenda in the Netherlands. That is seen as something related to specific groups of migrants. Also because the ministry and politicians have pushed this very much into the migrant corner. Once in a while, it appears in the newspaper that a Turkish woman is shot by her ex-partner or her father. But it has just disappeared from mainstream Dutch the agenda. It is felt as not really concerning the ethnic Dutch people” (G. Dütting, interview with the author, 2022).

The single exception to the gender neutrality rhetoric of the government's approach to violence against women is in the case of migrants. The fabricated intersectionality of the policies on violence against women attributes gender-based violence to the "allochthonous" communities. This constructed racialized character has caused society's disinterest in the killings. It is perceived as something that does not occur among the dominant "autochthonous" population. Hence, violence against "Dutch" women is considered an individual incident, while violence against women from a non-western migration background is regarded as a cultural issue. The interviewee from Atria explained that the institute aims to change this perception as feminicides are not limited to a specific culture or race.

"Also during the petition and the run-up to it, we made short films with certain assumptions about femicide, for example that it can happen to anyone so it is not that far away but that it is just around the corner. And also with numbers, that a woman is murdered every 8 days. We bring this to wider attention, especially among younger groups of men and women" (B. Myren, interview with the author, 2022).

Atria's petition has generally conceptualized how feminicides, or femicides in this case, are perceived and understood among feminist/women's organizations and how they aim to disseminate this terminology among the Dutch population. The petition "Stop Femicide!" started in November 2021 in order to demand the inclusion of femicide in the Dutch Criminal Code along with other measures to urge the Dutch government to prioritize the prevention of gender-based violence against women. First of all, Atria has pleaded for the extension of Article 287 to include murder motivated by sexism, appealing for a higher prison sentence than mere homicide, creating Article 287a:

"A person who intentionally takes the life of a close (ex-) partner, divorced partner or marriage partner with a sexist intent, shall be guilty of femicide and punished with a term of imprisonment not exceeding thirty years or a fine of the fifth category" (Atria 2021)⁴.

This incorporation of femicide in the Criminal Code would allow for the proper prosecution of perpetrators and accurate registration of this extreme form of violence against women. This official recognition would be an important step forward in the *de-genderneutralization* of the Dutch legislation as it would acknowledge the gendered and sexist nature that motivates this crime. In addition, the petition demands the professional development of police officers. This

⁴ Translated by author from Dutch: "Hij die opzettelijk een naaste (ex-) partner, gescheiden partner of huwelijkspartner met een seksistisch oogmerk van het leven beroofd, wordt als schuldig aan femicide, gestraft met gevangenisstraf van ten hoogste dertig jaren of geldboete van de vijfde categorie" (Atria 2021).

entails including a ‘femicide’ module in the initial police training, additional training for graduated police officers to compensate for the lack of knowledge on femicide, and to develop increased femicide expertise of emergency operators and community officers to train them in recognizing the patterns of violence that precede femicide. Furthermore, they argue for the establishment of at least one police unit that specializes in assisting victims of intimate partner violence, in combination with the eviction of the perpetrator. The latter is a refreshing outlook since they argue that women should not be condemned for not leaving their violent partner, as it should be the perpetrator that leaves the house and not vice versa. The proper training of police officers is crucial to increase the overall gender sensitivity of law enforcement, which until now has been lacking. While in other European countries, such as Spain, specialized police departments for violence against women already exist, in the Netherlands the police merely addresses “domestic violence” in collaboration with the *Veilig Thuis* organization. Hence, as previously argued, omitting the gendered nature of this form of violence. Moreover, offering support after cases of gender-based violence is also essential in effectively addressing gender-based violence. Nonetheless, the petition document frequently refers to women as “victims” instead of “survivors” which contributes to the perpetual victimization discourse, denying women agency. Additionally, although briefly, the petition includes a section on the treatment of perpetrators of intimate partner violence. Similar to the *Blijf van mijn lijf* shelters, they argue for the establishment of a government-financed organization for (potential) perpetrators of violence.

Finally, emphasizing prevention, Atria calls upon the relational education in school and the prevention of victim blaming in the media. They position education as an essential element in the prevention of femicide. They refer to a previous report published by Rutgers and Atria (2020) that concluded that 1 out of 10 people between the age of 15 and 30 years old, believe that men should be allowed to hit their girlfriend to demand respect. Therefore, Atria suggests that by incorporating sexual/relational education and subverting gender stereotypes that lead to gender-based violence, education becomes a key factor in preventing gender-based violence among young people. Atria argues that the media should be held accountable as they often use femicide as clickbait for commercial purposes. This sensationalizing of gender-based violence often entails victim blaming and disregards the severity of violence against women. The media play an important part in the education of the masses and should not contribute to the dissemination of sexist and misogynistic beliefs regarding women. These points illustrate that, for effectively addressing violence against women, prevention should be a key aspect.

Merely assisting survivors of gender-based violence or sentencing the perpetrators does not suffice. The petition ended in May 2022 and was signed by over 3,400 people. It has now been handed to the Commission on Education, Culture, and Science of the Second Chamber of parliament. While this has been an important step, the number of signatures unfortunately illustrates that the overall awareness regarding femicide in the Netherlands is still lacking. In comparison, the organization *Humanistisch Verbond* (Humanist Alliance) started a petition in May 2022 to demand the elimination of abortion from the Dutch Criminal Code as a response to the criminalization of abortion in the United States and Poland. This petition has received over 30,000 signatures. This clearly demonstrates that femicides do not receive the attention it deserves, not from society, the government, or the feminist movement.

3.2 A New Era for Dutch Feminism? Influences from the Past and Abroad

With Atria's petition, a new era for the feminist struggle against gender-based violence has slowly emerged. After years of silence, the feminist movement is now working towards the elimination of violence against women and its extremist form, femicide. Then, what has sparked the sudden interest in a phenomenon that has been addressed by feminist movements in other countries for decades? If the Dutch movement against gender-based violence is compared to other international feminist movements, even though femicide numbers might be lower than in other national contexts, it becomes evident that the feminist struggle has been rather neglected after the turn of the century. Although Latin American feminist movements have generated rather influential waves of activism in the past decade, in particular regarding gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive rights, of which the influences can also be found in European countries, the Netherlands has appeared to be quite immune to the impact of international feminisms. However, viral feminist movements such as #MeToo have reached the Netherlands and Latin American feminist groups have introduced translated versions of slogans such as "Ni Una Menos" or the Chilean protest song "A Rapist in Your Path" used by Latin American movements during the annual women's marches.

"Through migrants in the Netherlands. The Latinas do talk about it. Through international development organizations and self-organizations. Who writes about femicide or about feminist movements in the Netherlands? Those are development organizations" (G. Dütting, interview with the author, 2022).

Nonetheless, these feminist groups often maintain their focus in Latin America and do not address the feminicides occurring in the Netherlands. Instead, they continue the feminist struggle in their countries/region from the Netherlands. In addition, these Latin American feminist groups can primarily be found in highly urbanized areas and international cities such as Amsterdam. Therefore, when contacting these organizations they were not able to participate in the interview process as they do not focus on the Dutch context and feminist movement. Moreover, as mentioned in this quote, development organizations, as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also address feminicides. However, they merely focus on feminicides occurring in other “underdeveloped” countries instead of those that occur in the national context. Again, “othering” the issue of gender-based violence, attributing feminicides as exclusive to non-western “macho cultures”.

Nevertheless, the anglophone #MeToo movement has recently made its come back in the Netherlands due to several sexual harassment scandals concerning Dutch celebrities. This has had a rather significant impact on Dutch society as a Government Commissioner of sexual transgressive behavior and sexual violence has been appointed in 2022 to address this type of violence.

“The #MeToo movement has definitely had an impact as famous people are being taken down and the government has appointed Mariëtte Hamer as the rapporteur or advisor on Sexual Harassment but it is still not gender-based violence and femicide... So sexual harassment has come up on the agenda which had happened before, which is good but now we have to take it further to include all forms of gender-based violence” (Å. Ekvall, interview with the author, 2022).

However, while this should be considered an important step, this again is approached using a gender-neutral discourse. The fact that women are disproportionately victimized by sexual violence is not emphasized. In addition, as the previous quote illustrates, sexual violence is merely part of the greater conjunction that is gender-based violence. Therefore, it should be considered essential that the Netherlands, as in many other countries, dedicates an entire ministry to gender equality and women’s rights. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 2, while the feminist movement of the 20th century did address the issue of sexual violence and domestic violence, they did not focus on feminicides. Although feminism in that period did make progress in terms of women’s rights, including criminalizing marital rape, the feminist struggle against violence against women ceased after the 1990s.

“No, there was no focus on femicide in the 20th century. I think that this topic has always been unclear in the Netherlands. What you had was the domestic violence cases getting so out of hand that at some point the woman concerned was dead. And that was perceived more as an aberration. Maybe you are a migrant woman and your husband or your father shoots you, but that is mostly considered "them" by the majority. So those were the two kinds of femicides that the mainstream women's movement was talking about in the 1990s. Occasionally, murders of prostitutes are a very sensationalized press topic, but not as a systematic theme” (G. Dütting, interview with the author, 2022).

“The way we sometimes approach things now is not always on par with the feminism of 40 years ago. There is a different group of women behind it with a different motivation. It's just a different time and a different kind of discussion. But it does build on each other in some way. You do see certain patterns and things that do come back. And especially that in the 1990s the government had decided that the emancipation of women had succeeded, it has now been successful and we are now doing well. A lot of things were closed back then. So that took time to put everything back on the map and how important it is to keep talking about this” (B. Myren, interview with the author 2022).

It is therefore difficult to state whether the prior feminist movement has influenced the current developments initiated by Atria in terms of gender-based violence. The Dutch feminist movement has become detached from the international feminist movements as well as from the Dutch feminist movement of the 20th century. It appears that feminism in the Netherlands has been interrupted for almost twenty years and now has to recover and reclaim its presence in civil society. Despite the critiques towards the Dutch government regarding its gender-neutral approach, the Dutch feminist movement seems to have lived in its own bubble, untouched by larger international debates. The last two years did spark new debates in terms of women's rights and gender equality, but this attention might just have been caused by sensationalized individual murder cases rather than the obvious, but denied, structural and systemic essence of this extreme form of gender-based violence against women.

“We have now had a several murders quickly after each other, Humeyra being one of them, but several in a very short period of time that have had a lot of publicity. And as a result of that attention, both municipalities and practical organizations such as *Veilig Thuis* and women's shelters have started to address them in what way have we set up the chain in such a way that we can offer safety, and why did that go wrong? And that question means that the attention in the publicity has become greater, or vice versa, the publicity has ensured that this question is so emphatically on the table and that we also state together that we do not yet have a grip on this. Because it also seems to be a relatively constant figure of about 35 women per year” (K. Evertz, interview with the author, 2022).

3.3 Feminist Activism in the 21st Century: Approaches and Strategies

Then, how have women's organizations in the Netherlands approached and politicized femicides in the Netherlands? All respondents have indicated that the organizations mainly focus on raising awareness. This is an important first step as the phenomenon remains quite unknown within Dutch society. The linguistic use of the terms is crucial as it acknowledges a pattern of gender-based violence against women that has been restricted to the private sphere.

“For us, it is especially important that awareness is raised and that more attention is paid to broader prevention, as the petition also states: training the police so that they are more gender sensitive, perhaps education in schools so that this is just a phenomenon that all people should be aware of. That is actually our main battle right now. And adjusting criminal law, we know how complex that is. Research is also needed for that. In any case, changing the criminal code is a very long lobby to achieve such a thing. So for us, it is especially important now that a debate has started that the term is more used within politics” (B. Myren, interview with the author 2022).

The interviews have revealed that, so far, the main strategies that have been used for agenda-setting and awareness-raising purposes are conducting research and lobbying. By creating reports on gender-based violence, Atria and other organizations such as the Nederlandse Vrouwenraad have aimed to create awareness among the general population as well as inform policy makers on current issues and developments.

“They aim to make it public and to draw attention to it, which I think is not wrong. People have to understand that this is an issue and if the general public is more aware then it is easier to pressure politicians... On the political level, we have reached a point where we do need to have a national coordinator for violence against women and we have to organize it but nobody knows how because everything is so decentralized here” (Å. Ekvall, interview with the author, 2022).

Mass feminist activism as seen in other regions in the world seems to be lacking in the Netherlands. These reports are not publicly promoted or distributed to the general public. Therefore, the information disappears in the niche sector consisting of women's organizations and political parties rather than informing the overall population, which is essential in order to generate social and cultural change. Atria did create a “femicide bloc”

during the Women's March in 2022, but there are very few other organizations that contribute to the feminist struggle against feminicides or conduct independent research, i.e. not funded by the government. Yet, the feminist grass-roots organization Feminist Collages Amsterdam uses another strategy called "wheat pasting" to raise awareness by pasting short sentences and slogans in public spaces such as tunnels, bridges, and buildings.

"For us it is mostly pasting. But I think that it is still very Dutch in the way that it is very liberal. For example, Atria started the petition to incorporate femicide into the criminal code. I think it is very Dutch. We ask the government to include it in the criminal code but now we are also asking for other things such as getting abortion out of the criminal code and I do not think it is going to happen. In the future, when the government will have other priorities, which is also the kind of the case now. It is the neoliberal way of approaching feminicides, but it is not really working. It is still very much white feminism and white privilege" (L. Cleach, interview with author 2022).

In addition, although there are many benefits to using social media for activist purposes as has been discussed in Chapter 1, such as the dissemination of information, the inclusion of marginalized voices, the creation of online communities, and the organization of political mobilization, in the Netherlands cyberfeminism does not seem to constitute an important element in the current struggle against feminicides. Organizations do use their online platforms to promote their work related to these topics, such as the petition initiated by Atria, but unlike in other countries, there is no sense of hashtag activism nor is it used for mass mobilization. The interviewee from Feminist Collages stated a similar problem with online activism as the one previously mentioned; the information is not transferred to all sectors of societies and often remains within the same "feminist" circles.

"We had a confrontation with the police and they were saying "why don't you do this on social media?". But that is not the point. It does help a lot to share information for sure. However, it does create a bubble. But we do not use it as a movement. We do not create #MeToo or stuff like this. That is how social media works. As soon as you post something that is about one specific issue then Instagram will only show it to the people that are interested in this message. I have noticed people liking it and commenting on it, except if it goes viral, are people who agree with our message. That is why I really like pasting and those forms of activism because then everybody has to see it" (L. Cleach, interview with author 2022).

However, the issue with wheat pasting is that it is only visible to people who live in that specific area. As has been previously discussed, many women's organizations are located in and

focused on the highly urbanized areas. Hence, in order to create cultural and social change, more activism is needed to generate more awareness and reach a wider audience. Social media usage should therefore be optimized and utilized as a tool for mass mobilization and diffusion. Again, many lessons can be learned from the Latin American feminist movements as well as from other movements such as #MeToo as these movements have reached people in even the remotest areas. Furthermore, it allows the inclusion of marginalized women and incorporates an intersectional discourse that considers the different intersecting categories of oppression that also exist within feminist movements and women's organizations. Despite the fact that significant feminist activism in the Netherlands has not happened since the last century, international examples show that using cyberfeminism in the struggle against feminicides has great potential as it expands the participation possibilities to more informal actions rather than being limited to formal and official organizations. Moreover, interesting to the Dutch case is that, similar to the gender-neutral public policies on violence that emphasize men's possible victimization of gender-based violence, many women's organizations also highlight men's role in their analysis.

“I see potential in what we are doing now as an institute and also in all the cooperation that is now being done, also with organizations such as Emancipator⁵, that men's emancipation is simply more present on the agenda and that the cooperation is simply there. That says a lot about where we are going as a feminist Netherlands. Not everyone will support this because of course you have a lot of different movements and perspectives, but I think it is an important step for us that simply has more empathy for boys and men. What we hear in the Act4Respect programs is that boys are now thinking about what is allowed and what is not. There is now also a lot of censorship on what men are and are not allowed to do and there has to be something for that, about being a perpetrator. We need to talk about that. How does this happen and how can we prevent it in the future?” (B. Myren, interview with the author 2022).

This illustrates that, although Atria and other women's organizations have aimed to subvert the government's gender-neutral approach by adopting a gender perspective, they continue to focus on men's victimization not only as victims of gender-based violence but also by empathizing with men as potential victimizer. While it is without a doubt important to include men in the struggle against violence against women, as both men and women are affected by

⁵ Emancipator is an organization that aims to combat gender inequality, focusing on men's emancipation in different areas: violence and safety, work and care, sexual and gender diversity, and sexuality. They strive to create awareness regarding the benefits of gender equality and change the dominant social norms for men and masculinity.

the patriarchy and the corresponding gender roles/stereotypes, they should not constitute the protagonists of the feminist discourse. Changing men's behaviour towards women should be the main objective. Nonetheless, it should not go as far as justifying the prevalence of gender-based violence by empathizing with the perpetrators of violence against women as this would only further stress the lack of men's accountability and responsibility. Besides collaborating with men's organizations, women's organizations should rather claim agency in this struggle and cooperate among themselves. Then again, what is the feminist discourse in the Netherlands?

3.4 A Long Way to Go: Achievements and Obstacles

Although the topic of femicides in the Netherlands is still quite recent, the fact that Atria and other women's organizations have introduced the term "femicide" into the current discourse has been a great achievement. This has been an important first step in the struggle against violence against women and particularly femicides. This term offers a gender-based analysis of the killing of women that has been lacking, and is still lacking, in the government's approach to violence. The impact of Atria's campaign and petition on the public opinion is still to be seen. Nonetheless, it has generated new opportunities for further research and political debates.

"We have managed to get the government and the main political parties to realize that this is important but that is only step one, but now what to do about it. How can we get a national coordinator? The how is difficult and that is going to take some time" (Å. Ekvall, interview with the author, 2022).

"The Ministry of Social Affairs is working on this issue. It's not 100% gone from the debate, because the ministry is working on it. Is that a political discussion? Is it effective? No... And the Dutch policewomen are also working on it and other specialists. There are researchers who work for the police and who are investigating that. But that is limited to the prevention side. And that is specific and not the general public opinion. In the Netherlands we are made to think: "Do we have a problem? Then we will just tackle it as efficiently as possible". The more technical and simpler the interventions, the better, especially according to the majority of politicians. The Netherlands has an organizational culture, not a political debate culture" (G. Dütting, interview with the author, 2022).

“People are more aware now. We know the numbers. We know the statistics. It is there. It is in the feminist movement. But I live in the feminist bubble. But I do think people are more aware and if we continue like this, it will get there, but we are not enough people yet to reach the whole society. And we focus on Amsterdam and mostly in Amsterdam people are aware because that is where we act. But if you go outside of Amsterdam, actually where it matters and where it happens, it is not really happening. We have to continue our journey and push it further to reach everybody” (L.Cleach, interview with author 2022).

It has become clear that the overall awareness of the issue among the general population has not yet been achieved and requires more effort from the women’s organizations and the government. As discussed in the previous section, this form of social and cultural changes requires direct feminist activism that goes beyond the government-commissioned campaigns and research initiatives. This entails subverting the gender neutral-discourse and applying a gender/feminist analysis to the issue and, more importantly, disseminating the information among the population, as this specific discourse remains within the boundaries of the government/NGO bubble. The interviews have revealed that there are several obstacles that impede the progress of the struggle against feminicides. The main obstacles include the lack of awareness, the lack/inefficient cooperation between organizations, the political decentralization of gender-based violence across the different levels of government, the lack of intersectionality, and the overall absence of a feminist movement in the Netherlands.

“An obstacle is certainly the phenomenon in itself that it is so unknown. Precisely because such large institutes such as CBS register it in a certain way and that it does not get that label, that makes it difficult. The media is also a major obstacle, which addresses it in a very specific way and sometimes even has empathy for the perpetrator because it is a crime of passion... And also within feminism, if you look at 15 years ago when violence against women was on the agenda, and especially sexual violence, now it is still something new. If I also consider how much research has been done, especially in the Netherlands it is still quite limited... I would also find it very interesting if there were more lines with the different movements. At Atria, we are more of a knowledge institute, so a little less activist. We did participate in the women’s march, but if you look at the past of Atria, it is more research, which we use to show where the emphasis should lie, and what the policy should be about. But when I look at what the new generation needs, the activist movement becomes relevant.” (B. Myren, interview with the author 2022).

Apart from the absence of an official definition of femicide/feminicide in the criminal code, which is an essential element in Atria’s discourse, this quote explains that the research, as well

as the “activism”, that has been carried out in the past years has been rather inadequate. The unfamiliarity of the concept “femicide” impedes the recognition of a phenomenon that has been denied among the dominant sectors of society and is normalized in marginalized social groups. This could be associated with the lack of an intersectional feminist perspective. As has been restated by several interviewees, women’s/feminist organizations in the Netherlands often operate from the dominant White/middle class feminist discourse, not considering other interconnected systems of oppression such as racism and classism.

“We are not intersectional enough. We need to take more people into account, like people of colour and people that do not live in Amsterdam, people who cannot live in Amsterdam and who actually experience these issues. It is not there yet. There are also a lot of battles between the different feminist groups. We sometimes disagree and I don't think we should focus on that. Everybody has their own opinion, especially in Amsterdam. We need to first focus on the definition and agreeing together. But we do not talk about it yet. So it is not there yet, but we still keep on acting... It is still very much white feminism. We try to be intersectional but we do not talk about it that much. We do not go further than talking with another member of our feminist group. It is not intersectional yet, but it is getting there. Social media does help a lot here because you can spread a lot of information about this... I actually criticize Atria a lot about this. They do not really consider people of colour and queer people. It is less of an active activism. It is still very small and they cater to the government. And the bigger feminist groups are not really connected. But we are on our good path, we just started” (L. Cleach, interview with author 2022).

However, as correctly stated by some of the interviewees, while intersectionality is very important when conducting feminist analysis on gender-based violence, it should be used with certain caution. As explained in Chapter 2, the Dutch government only interrupted the gender-neutral approach when considering gender-based violence among migrant communities under the false pretenses of incorporating an intersectional perspective. This quote further touches upon the dominant White feminist discourse that does not address violence against women in migrant communities due to notions of cultural relativism and ethnocentrism that consider this racialized and gendered form of violence as something inherent to “their culture”. This misleading discourse contributes to the discrimination and marginalization of specific racial/religious/ethnic groups. In addition, it creates the evasive belief that gender-based violence, and in particular its most extreme form, does not occur in the “autochthonous” sector of Dutch society.

“First of all, we know that gender-based violence exists everywhere. So one has to be careful that it does not become something that only Moroccans do for example or only lower educated people. It is important to say that this happens in all sectors of society... There can be specific cultures or specific categories where you might have to look into it a bit more but there at the end it is still patriarchal norms that are the problem. They express themselves a bit differently in different communities. I think that it is dangerous to divide it too much because then we might think that it does not happen in white educated areas and that is dangerous. Patriarchal norms can look different in different places but they are everywhere” (Åsa Ekvall, interview with the author, 2022).

Another important issue that has been mentioned during the interviews is the flawed government structure. The issue of violence against women, or “domestic violence” according to the government’s rhetoric, is divided between three different ministries. This causes coordination problems that complicate the creation of adequate social policies as well as their efficient implementation. In a more pragmatic sense, this decentralization generates bureaucratic obstacles that contribute to the deficient registration of feminicides, the lack of aid for gender-based violence survivors, insufficient prevention measures, and lack of dedicated resources. Therefore, the establishment of a ministry dedicated to gender equality should be an essential point on the feminist agenda.

“It is divided between those three ministries: the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Justice and it is now also part of the Ministry of Social Affairs... Also in the context of the corona crisis, we saw that a shadow pandemic was taking place. This was also noted by our member organisations, female general practitioners, but also local women's organizations saw that on the one hand, more reports of gender-related violence ended up in their homes, but that this did not translate into asking for extra help with the bodies set up for that purpose. So there was a gap. That is what we also noticed, that on the one hand we hear and see that it happens more often but that is not reported and why is that? How did that gap get there? How can people not find those agencies that are there to help... That is what inspired us to start that project specifically on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, that we saw that the agencies that are there are not coordinating well with each other. And that is partly due to policy, so not only in practice where things go wrong but also in policy. We see that the subject of violence against women is divided over three different ministries. And because that coordination is not well organised, there are no dedicated resources, there is no designated policy person to fulfill that function, we saw that a great deal of information cannot be found or that the policy is not coherent” (A. Huits, interview with the author 2022).

The gender-neutrality of the public policies remains an issue that is perpetuated by the decentralized government structure as this creates a legal vacuum that municipal governments can interpret according to their own political agenda. This generates discrepancies in criteria that are used to measure and register feminicides and other forms of gender-based violence. Also the public policies and campaigns can therefore differ per region of the country. The gender-neutrality aspect here diminishes the severity of feminicides as it denies the structural and systemic issues.

“And according to the policy of Veilig Thuis, they have to treat violence against women as gender neutral. That is really a disaster. And this means that femicide is not perceived as femicide but as a woman that is murdered. And it is decentralized in the Netherlands and that is another disaster because there is no coordination. Every municipality can do what they want...What kind of help you get depends on what municipality you live in. That is a disaster. And in different police districts they register data with different criteria. You have different types of data in different court districts. So you cannot really have the whole picture and go to the government to demand policies. And since the police does not understand gender-based violence, including femicide, and the court system has the same problem, we do not really have a policy” (Å. Ekvall, interview with the author, 2022).

Furthermore, the absence of a legal framework that includes the concept of feminicides causes inconsistency and errors in the registration process of these gender-based murders. Hence, the collected data by CBS is rather relative as it is likely that not all violence against women, including murder, is not adequately categorized as such. Since this data is used by women’s organizations as well as by the government in the creation of reports on violence, it can cause variation in research outcomes and conclusions. As was discussed in the previous chapter, the data can easily be misinterpreted or manipulated to suit certain political objectives. In addition, the presentation of the data by both women’s organizations and government institutions rather differs, depending on which data sources are used. This leads to the underestimated severity of the issue and unidentified patterns that can be found in this form of gender-based violence against women. Thus, the lack of a proper national coordination is reflected in the flawed data that results in inadequate public policies.

“Besides the fact that there is no national coordination on gender-based violence or violence against women, we also see that there are no figures. The data is very limited. And that is a very important starting point to see how big the problem really is. Of course, the individual stories and sharing them are also important to make it a topic for discussion, but you also need the data

to identify trends and see patterns. Just as we saw that during the corona pandemic the reports numbers were lower, is it because they were incomplete? Then you can draw your conclusions there. We simply see that the data collection is incomplete and does not happen independently. So it is difficult to influence or analyze or adjust policy there because you do not have the data” (A. Huits, interview with the author 2022).

Nevertheless, despite the lack of awareness, intersectionality, and national coordination, the main issue that arose is the absence of a feminist movement in the Netherlands. Since the 1990s, the feminist movement in the country has disappeared in the gender-neutral neoliberal discourse that cut the subsidies of women’s organizations in combination with the false assumption that gender equality has been achieved. While in other countries feminist movements address gender-based violence and demand policy change from the government, the Netherlands has not seen this kind of activism in the last two decades. The country has branded itself as liberal and tolerant, creating the myth that gender-based violence does not occur, or is limited to migrant communities. It appears that women’s organization have refrained from using a feminist discourse and analysis in their research and campaigns.

“There is not much of a feminist movement in the Netherlands. There are individuals. Even Atria they do not really brand themselves as feminist. It seems that everybody is afraid of the word and there are lots of women's organizations and there are many organizations that work with different types of violence against women. But most of them will not go as far as using a feminist analysis. Being an outsider in the Netherlands I find it very difficult to understand why people are so much against it. I find the Netherlands very conservative and Dutch people think they are very liberal but I find it very conservative. Especially when it comes to these questions around gender and making analyses of power and hierarchies. So, for me, there is not really a feminist movement in the Netherlands to start with. There are individuals and women's rights organizations but they don't present themselves as feminist, which means that the whole analysis part is missing... Then comes the whole idea that gender equality has been achieved. So, femicide is first of all a word that has only recently been used here and still a lot of people do not use it” (Å. Ekvall, interview with the author, 2022).

The existing women’s organizations are very much focused on the government due to the subsidy system that has been put in place. Instead of conducting independent research or activism, these organizations respond to the government’s needs in order to receive funding. This could be attributed to the effects of the capitalist heteropatriarchal rhetoric that has been intrinsically perpetuated by the current gender-neutral discourse on violence. Nonetheless,

unlike in other countries, there is no significant feminist movement that fights for the rights of women. There is no sense of camaraderie or sisterhood between the different women's organizations, nor is there an active or inclusive feminist community that addresses these issues. Instead, as mentioned by the interviewees, the absence of coordination and collaboration has led to a sense of competition between the different women's organizations. Hence, the lack of feminist discourse and analysis in the 21st century impedes the mobilization of feminist activism that was present in the 20th century.

“It is not just a question of subsidies, which is of course important for the survival of an organization. Everything called civil society in the Netherlands or all kinds of organizations are sponsored by the government in order to survive; in many countries they are kept afloat by membership fees or donations. In the Netherlands, the discussions are about subsidies, also because we no longer have strong social movements. So what is the feminist movement in the Netherlands that should do something about this? I would not know (with the exception of Emancipator). We are now in a phase where these problems are partly still there and partly changed in character. But young people who should now take to the streets or take whatever action, they are not doing it, only online without much result. And that is part of individualism, or the fact that it does not matter anyway. It is also not clear where you can find it. It is not really available at the universities or online” (G. Dütting, interview with the author, 2022).

“First of all many organizations are still scared to use the word feminist. The Dutch culture of people thinking that everything is fine as it is, of thinking "but we are not “macho” here, so that can not be a problem". I would like the Dutch organizations to start working with each other because today there is a little bit of a competition. Everybody wants their name on it. So, instead of working for the common good, they are bad at cooperating. If there were cooperating it would be easier to be more controversial and introduce a feminist analysis and then it would not be so marginalized... There are so few people who dare to make this analysis openly that they are being perceived as marginal. And people who are marginal you can always ignore but if there are a lot of people who say the same thing then they cannot be ignored and marginalize them in the same way. So the lack of cooperation and lack of guts” (Å. Ekvall, interview with the author, 2022).

To conclude, feminicides remain quite unknown and ignored by the government as well as by women's organizations. Despite Atria's efforts, there is still a long road ahead for the recognition of this social phenomenon in the Netherlands. Although progress has been made in terms of awareness regarding violence against women, particularly sexual violence, the

gender-neutral approach remains the dominant discourse within the country. This leads to flawed policies and ineffective public campaigns as this narrative omits the gendered and structural nature of violence against women by isolating cases of femicide rather than identifying patterns. Women's organizations do often not address the feminicides that are occurring within the national context. The first step has been made as the term "femicide" has been introduced in the public debate, but, regardless, the lack of awareness, the absence of national coordination between the different levels of government and women's organizations, and the inadequate feminist discourse form obstacles for the effective elimination of feminicides in the Netherlands. Much can be learned from other feminist movements in the world, particularly those in Latin America, and how they demand justice for the prevalence of gender-based violence. It is therefore important to generate a paradigm shift that subverts the Eurocentric and gender-neutral discourse by properly conceptualizing femicides, preferably referring to feminicides, acknowledging the structural nature of gendered power relations that transcend the domestic sphere and result in violence against women. Feminism has to regain its presence in civil society to form an opposing force to the government and challenge the hegemonic heteropatriarchal order.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has aimed to provide an answer to the following research question: How has the Dutch feminist movement addressed the issue of gender-based violence, in particular feminicides, in the Netherlands? The literature analysis that constitutes the theoretical framework that is presented in Chapter 1 has discussed the different approaches to violence against women and gender-based violence, discussing the past and current debates within feminist theory. It has further analyzed the conceptualization of “femicide”, the violent killing of women for gender-based reasons while building upon and expanding this concept to the term “feminicide”. The use of the latter aims to incorporate a more comprehensive perspective on the structural and normalized nature of this form of gender-based violence encountered in all heteropatriarchal societies that is legitimized and perpetuated by the state as well as on the individual level. Using this paradigm shifting feminist theory from Latin American scholars allows moving beyond the Eurocentric white feminist discourse that has dominated the Netherlands. By subverting this hegemonic rhetoric, this thesis introduces the South-to-North flow of knowledge as it proposes the use of “feminicide” rather than “femicide” to stress the systemic and pervasive essence of gender-based violence that has been omitted in the Dutch context. In addition, this analysis of the academic literature further discussed examples of international feminist activism against gender-based violence in order to illustrate the current feminist responses to feminicide. Therefore, this thesis has examined and compared the current state of the feminist discourse and activism in the Netherlands with the feminist activism of the 20th century as well as with international feminist movements.

Moreover, in order to contextualize the current response to feminicides in the Netherlands in the 21st century, this thesis has provided an overview of the past and current legislation on violence against women in the Netherlands in Chapter 2. It has examined and criticized the gender-neutral approach to violence against women, or domestic violence as it is commonly referred to, that was introduced during the 1990s. This perspective neglects and denies the gendered power hierarchies that result in violence against women. The gender-neutral discourse has continued to dominate the public policies on violence throughout the 21st century. It assumes a false state of gender equality in the Netherlands that ascribes violence against women almost exclusively to migrant “allochthonous” communities while denying its presence in the dominant “autochthonous” part of society. Therefore, the gender-neutral approach has obtained a racialized and cultured character that marginalizes migrant communities. In

addition, this chapter further explored the feminist response to violence against women in the 20th century. While the feminist movement in the Netherlands actively addressed violence against women in the 1970s and 1980s, in particular sexual violence, creating a network of women's shelters, this change in policy regime from a gendered perspective to gender-neutrality was simultaneously introduced with the implementation of neoliberal policies. Therefore, as this chapter explains, this regime change entailed the end of government funding for many women's organizations. Accordingly, this provoked the end of the feminist movement and its fight against gender-based violence. Nevertheless, as presented in this chapter, the Netherlands is far from reaching gender equality. In terms of femicide, every eight days, a woman is killed due to gender-based reasons, usually by her (ex-)partner. As part of the gender-neutral discourse, the Dutch legislation does not include any official definition of femicide/femicide in its criminal code, causing discrepancies in the official data. Hence, as these numbers are reflected in public policy, and are open to interpretation, the severity of the issue, as well as its structural nature, is neglected and denied by the government. This has perpetuated the normalization of this phenomenon. Thus, in order to properly document the prevalence of femicides, as well as other forms of gender-based violence in the country, more research, resources, and attention is required from the government and civil society.

Then, in order to answer the main research question, this thesis has explored different elements: the conceptualization of femicides in the Netherlands by women's organizations, the influences from the Dutch feminist movement of the 20th century and other international movements, the approaches and strategies that are used by these organizations to raise awareness and politicize the issue of femicides, and their achievements as well as the existing obstacles in the fight against this extreme form of gender-based violence against women. From this analysis, it can be concluded that the concept of femicide/femicide in the Netherlands remains rather unknown. Despite the broad international attention to this issue, the Netherlands appears to have fallen behind in this feminist debate. Atria has recently introduced the term "femicide", instead of "femicide", by presenting a petition to raise awareness for the killing of women for gender-based reasons, demanding the incorporation of this term in the criminal code among other preventative measures. Nevertheless, as discussed in Chapter 3, this organization is the only organization that "actively" addresses and acknowledges this issue. The overall used rhetoric to approach this phenomenon is rather flawed as it still resonates with the gender-neutral perspective introduced by the Dutch government rather than incorporating an independent feminist discourse. Despite the fact that in the last two years the term femicide

has been presented in the public debate, the assumed myth that gender equality has been achieved in the country appears to be consolidated among the women's organizations as this issue is not granted any importance. This still might be the consequence of the demise of the feminist movement during the 1990s. Therefore, the adequate conceptualization of femicide, or preferably feminicide, that stresses the gendered and structural essence is lacking in the current discourse. This conceptualization can merely be found among the grass-roots radical leftist feminist groups. Yet, this is a rather niche community as most women's organizations are recipients of government funding and are therefore more in line with the existing policy regime instead of challenging the hegemonic gender-neutral paradigm. Hence, it is questioned whether there is an actual feminist movement and discourse present in the Netherlands.

Furthermore, this research has explored whether international feminist movements against gender-based violence have sparked the current interest, however little, in the Netherlands. It appears that the Dutch women's organizations have been rather immune to influences from abroad. While feminist movements in Latin America, the United States, and even in other European countries actively aim to tackle the issue of feminicide and other forms of gender-based violence against women, the Dutch organizations have not followed these international movements. Although the viral #MeToo movement did make its comeback in the country, the discourse does not seem to move beyond sexual violence. The establishment of the Government Commissioner for sexual transgressive behavior and sexual violence has been an important step, but again the lack of an overarching understanding of the effects of asymmetrical gender power hierarchies impedes the effectiveness of this approach as it does not include all forms of gender-based violence, let alone feminicide. In addition, this chapter has examined whether the feminist discourse introduced during the past century has influenced the current debate on violence against women. However, it can be concluded that after the 1990s the Dutch feminist movement ceased to exist, thus losing its ties with the current "movement". The debate on violence has become detached from its feminist roots as the gender-neutral discourse has dominated the discourse. Feminism has lost its presence in civil society and cases of feminicide are therefore approached as individual incidents instead of considered as an intrinsic consequence of heteropatriarchal societal structures.

In addition, due to Atria's campaign and petition to end feminicides in the Netherlands, this third Chapter has analyzed how this phenomenon is currently approached and politicized, examining the strategies that are applied. As this concept is still rather new in the national context, the main aim of women's organizations such as Atria is to create awareness. Therefore,

introducing the term “femicide” through their petition has been an important first step to drawing more attention to this issue. Although the proper conceptualization is still lacking as it requires a more profound feminist analysis that expands upon the proposed definition by Atria, this linguistic interference in the current national vocabulary is an essential strategy in this struggle. Moreover, other important strategies have been conducting research and lobbying with policy makers for the incorporation of this concept into the criminal code and public policy. Nonetheless, these strategies all seem to be directed at the government level rather than the general public. Hence, the awareness regarding this issue among the general population remains quite limited, if not non-existing. Mass feminist activism as seen in other countries does not seem to occur in the Netherlands. Some feminist grass-roots organizations do employ other strategies such as wheat pasting as a form of resistance that is more directed at the general public. However, this does only occur on a small scale. This research has also confirmed that cyberfeminism and activism, which have been used by many other feminist movements, do not play an important role in the struggle against gender-based violence. This would be a great alternative in addition to the existing strategies as it entails an accessible form of mass participation and activism. Chapter 3 has further revealed that women’s organizations have adopted the gender-neutral discourse in their approach as they stress the role of men as victims of heteropatriarchal gender norms, empathizing with men as perpetrators of violence. Although it is crucial to include men in the fight against gender-based violence and generate social/cultural change, it should not veil men’s accountability. However, this is a controversial topic within the feminist debate.

Finally, Chapter 3 has examined the achievements as well as obstacles faced by the women’s organizations in the politicization of femicides. In terms of achievements, the introduction of the term femicide has been an important step since this concept has been unknown until now. It offers the opportunity to address this form of gender-based violence from a gendered perspective and counteract the gender-neutral discourse. However, its effects on the public opinion as well as public policy are still to be seen, but it has generated new opportunities for research and political debates. This research has further illustrated that there are several obstacles that impede the effective interference of women’s organizations. First of all, the lack of awareness and unfamiliarity with the concept itself forms an impediment. The normalization/denial of gender-based violence is reinforced by the absence of a legal framework that operates from a gendered/feminist perspective. In order to raise more awareness and generate sociocultural change, it is essential that the information and data on

femicides are transmitted to the population as it is merely circulated among government institutions and non-governmental organizations. In addition, the flawed sense of intersectionality among women's organizations and the government has created the belief that femicides merely occur among the (non-western) migrant communities. This is caused by notions of eurocentrism, racism, and White feminism that dominate the current discourse. Hence, a feminist intersectional approach should be carefully applied to counteract the disguised marginalization and discrimination of non-western women while recognizing the universal violent effects of heteropatriarchal social norms. Furthermore, the decentralization of the issue of violence against women within the government structure causes bureaucratic obstacles for women's organizations. Different ministries and levels of government can interpret data differently due to the lack of a legal framework. The discrepancies in analysis outcomes are reflected in inconsistent and inadequate public policies. Nonetheless, the main issue that has been identified is the overall absence of a feminist movement and discourse in the Netherlands. As this thesis has demonstrated, after the 1990s the feminist movement disappeared due to the neoliberal and gender-neutral regime. The false assumption that gender equality has been achieved has echoed through the 21st century and has curtailed all forms of feminist activism in the Netherlands. Women's organizations do not apply a feminist discourse or brand themselves as feminist in any way. The strong ties with the government, in conjunction with the lack of collaboration between the different organizations, impede their independence to challenge and counteract the government's political discourse. Instead, the institutionalization of the women's movement has diminished the role of feminism in society. The lack of a feminist movement perpetuates the constructed myth that feminism is no longer needed and that gender equality has been achieved. This is especially harmful when considering the significant prevalence of gender-based violence in the country.

To conclude, although first steps have been made to raise awareness regarding femicides, the women's movement in the Netherlands hardly addresses this phenomenon. The term is still rather unrecognized among government institutions, women's organizations, and the population. The gender-neutral discourse has created a paradigm that diminishes the severity of gender-based violence as it does not acknowledge the preceding asymmetric gendered power relations that are in place. By introducing the term femicide, Atria has sparked new possibilities for the resurgence of a feminist discourse. Nonetheless, this requires the further politicization of gender-based violence in tandem with the organization and mobilization of an intergenerational feminist movement that functions as a force of resistance to challenge the

status quo, something that is quite abnormal within Dutch culture and society. Therefore, this thesis proposes the feminist analysis of feminicides in the Netherlands, stressing the subversion of the gender-neutral discourse from an intersectional and gendered perspective that emphasizes the structural nature of gender-based violence against women. Hence, this thesis endorses the use of feminicide rather than femicide as this term offers a more comprehensive analysis of a systemic and institutionalized consequence of the heteropatriarchal order. There is still a long way to go to achieve the elimination of this extreme form of gender-based violence. However, with more research, activism, and public campaigns, women's organizations can kindle the resurgence of the Dutch feminist movement.

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ANNEXES

Annex 1: Interview Questions

1. How is the killing of women (femicide/feminicide) conceptualized and framed within the current feminist discourse in the Netherlands?
2. In Latin America, feminist movements have used the term ‘feminicide’ instead of ‘femicide’ to refer to the structural and systemic nature of gender-based violence that is expressed through the violent killing of women. Could this term be adopted in the Dutch context?
3. Organizations such as Atria are petitioning for the incorporation of the term ‘femicide’ in the policy framework and are demanding the government to prioritize the prevention of this extreme form of gender-based violence. Why has the issue of femicides become a topic of interest for the feminist movement nowadays? What has sparked this attention?
4. How would you describe the approach that is used by feminist/women’s organizations to politicize and address femicides in the Dutch context? What strategies have been adopted to influence the public opinion on gender-based violence and femicides?
5. Overall, violence against women in heteropatriarchal societies is normalized and therefore often neglected by the media and politics. What has been the impact so far of the feminist movement’s activism regarding gender-based violence and feminicides on society?
6. What have been obstacles for the women’s movement in the struggle against gender-based violence against women and in particular feminicides?
7. Since the 1990s, the policy framework on violence against women in the Netherlands has been based on a “gender-neutral” approach. How has this approach affected the development and mobilization of the feminist movement against feminicides?
8. How has the Dutch feminist movement during the 20th century previously addressed the issue of feminicides in the Netherlands?
9. How has the feminist discourse on (sexual) violence of the 20th century influenced the current struggle against feminicides?

10. Other international feminist movements such as #MeToo (2017) and #NiUnaMenos have generated more overall awareness regarding gender-based violence. How have these movements influenced the current Dutch feminist movement against violence against women?
11. These aforementioned feminist movements have used social media as a central axis of their activism. What part does social media play in the current feminist activism against feminicides and other forms of gender-based violence?
12. The concept of intersectionality refers to the different intersecting categories of oppression and violence against women based on race, class, sexuality, etc. How has the Dutch feminist movement incorporated this concept in its discourse on violence against women and the prevalence of feminicides?

Annex 2: List of Interviewees

| Name | Profile | Date |
|-----------------|---|------------|
| Amanda Huits | Board member of the Nederlandse Vrouwenraad | 03-05-2022 |
| Louise Cleach | Member of Feminist Collages Amsterdam | 11-05-2022 |
| Gisela Dütting | Gender Expert for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the European Union, former senior specialist Gender and Livelihood at UN Women, and former affiliate researcher at Atria | 10-05-2022 |
| Kristine Evertz | Senior policy advisor domestic violence at the Municipality of Gouda, Board member European Women's Lobby, former project manager at Blijf Groep | 11-05-2011 |
| Britt Myren | Senior researcher at Atria | 19-05-2022 |
| Åsa Ekvall | Founder of Ekvall Consulting, one of the founders of the Dutch national committee of UN Women, board member of AtGender | 30-06-2022 |