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Making Women Visible: Women's Human Rights Activism in the 1970s

In 1995 at the fourth UN World Conference on Women in Beijing, First Lady Hilary Clinton proclaimed: 'If there is one message that echoes forth from this conference, let it be that human rights are women's rights and women's rights are human rights, once and for all.'[1] Her statement was met with thunderous applause, cheers and pounding on tables from the delegates and her message did echo forth, in headlines and on front pages, in activist communities, in policymaking at the UN and in individual countries. But how did women's rights become human rights?

Twenty years earlier, when the first UN Conference on Women was held in Mexico City and the newly emerging human rights discourse began to gain traction, the connection between women's rights and human rights was not at all self-evident. It was in this decade, the 1970s, that human rights became the call to arms for activists and politicians from both sides of the Iron Curtain. Although the language had been inscribed in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) since 1948, it was not until this period that mass movements started to use the discourse to pressure governments at home and abroad to improve their human rights record. Human rights in this period mostly meant civil and political rights, or protection of the individual against repression by its own government. These rights were described in the first part of the UDHR, while the second part dealt with economic and social rights. Activists in the 1970s came to see it as the responsibility not only of the UN, but of all governments to prevent other governments from committing human rights violations against their own citizens. Typical cases of human rights violations protested by NGOs in this period were, for instance, the torturing of political prisoners by

[1] Hillary Clinton, 'Women's rights are human rights', speech before the fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, September 5, 1995. Video available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXM4E23Efvk

dictatorships in Chile and Argentina, but also the persecution of dissidents in the Soviet Union. The groundswell of the new rhetoric and activism culminated in 1977, when US President Jimmy Carter promised to insert human rights considerations into his foreign policy and Amnesty International won the Nobel Peace prize for its human rights activism.[2]

The (long) 1970s was also the decade of second wave feminism. Starting in the early sixties in the US and Western Europe, women fought for rights beyond enfranchisement, such as the right to abortion and birth control, laws against discrimination in the workplace, solutions to the gender wage gap and protections against sexual harassment and rape. The movement won some significant victories, like Supreme Court cases *Eisenstadt v. Baird*, which legalized birth control for all Americans, or *Roe v. Wade*, which made abortion legal in 1973. While western feminists struggled for rights described in the UDHR as well, their focus was mostly on social and economic rights, not on the civil and political rights the human rights movement was concerned with.

Although both movements were active in the 1970s, it took almost twenty years before Clinton popularized the phrase 'women's rights are human rights.' The history of the connection between the two concepts was not that of a linear, progressive evolution, but that of muddled, jerky developments with multiple points of origin. Scholars who have studied the history of women's human rights have not sufficiently recognized this. They have often been overly focused on the UN World Conferences for Women, in 1975 in Mexico City, 1980 in Copenhagen and 1985 in Nairobi, drawing a direct line from 1975 to the Beijing conference in 1995. This focus on the UN has also narrowed the definition of 'rights' in this scholarship to those included in UN documents, disregarding interpretations of rights by groups and individuals working outside the UN framework. Lastly, centralizing the UN has moved attention away from

[2] Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (New York, 2010).

the grassroots level, where feminist NGOs and individual activists were grappling with ways to frame their struggle in contexts other than the UN conferences.[3]

This essay will return the focus to the grassroots level and explore the complex beginnings of the intersections between the women's rights and human rights movements in the 1970s. I will discuss both the physical ties between the movements, like people transferring organizations, correspondence between them or shared sites of activism, and analyze the transformation and evolution of ideas and definitions concerning women's rights and human rights. It will show that the eventual turn women's activists made towards using the human rights discourse for their work was neither inevitable nor necessarily logical.

Specifically, I will look at the work of two women's rights organizations concerning human rights abuses: the US chapter of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and the Dutch organization 'Women, Church and the Developing World' (VKW). The WILPF was founded in 1915 to protest World War I and grew to be one of the largest women's organizations in existence, with two of its leaders receiving Nobel Peace prizes in 1931 and 1948. It established chapters all over the world and obtained consultative status with ECOSOC at the UN in 1948. VKW was founded in 1976, inspired by the

[3] Allida Black, 'Are Women "Human"? The UN and the Struggle to Recognize Women's Rights as Human Rights,' in: Akira Irye, Petra Goedde, William I. Hitchcock ed., *The Human Rights Revolution: An International History* (New York, 2012) 133-158, Martha Alter Chen, 'Engendering World Conferences: the International Women's Movement and the United Nations,' *Third World Quarterly*, 16:3 (1995) 477-494, Arvonne S. Fraser, 'Becoming Human: The Origins and Development of Women's Human Rights,' *Human Rights Quarterly*, 21:4 (1999) 853-906, Jean H. Quataert, 'The Circuitous Origins of the Gender Perspective in Human Rights Advocacy: A Challenge for Transnational Feminists,' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 31:3 (2011) 631-643, Jean H. Quataert, 'The Gendering of Human Rights in the International Systems of Law in the Twentieth Century', in: Michael Adas ed., *Essays on Twentieth-Century History* (Philadelphia, 2010) 116-160, Elisabeth Friedman, 'Women's Human Rights: The Emergence of a Movement,' in: Julie Peters, Andrea Wolper ed., *Women's Rights, Human Rights: International Feminist Perspectives* (New York, 1995).
For an exception, see: Celia Donert, 'Women's Rights in Cold War Europe: Disentangling Feminist Histories,' *Past and Present* (2013) 178-202, Celia Donert, 'Whose Utopia? Gender, Ideology and Human Rights at the 1975 World Congress on Women in Berlin,' in: Jan Eckel, Samuel Moyn ed., *The Breakthrough: Human Rights in the 1970s* (Philadelphia, 2014) 68-87. Donert discusses the socialist women's movement in the Soviet bloc and argues it was grappling with questions surrounding women's rights as human rights ever since the UDHR was adopted.

United Nations International Women's Year 1975.[4] It was an umbrella organization of several smaller Christian women's groups and aimed to show international solidarity with women from developing countries.

While both organizations are but a small sample of the plethora of NGOs in the US and the Netherlands, they provide a useful window into parts of the women's rights movement. Both organizations were firmly embedded within a transnational network, corresponding and cooperating with women's and human rights organizations from outside their countries and outside the 'West.' The WILPF, as one of the oldest and largest women's organizations, had a vast international structure of its own, with an International Office in Geneva and national chapters in multiple countries. VKW, on the other hand, was a new and small NGO, very much a product of the 1970s. In its function as an umbrella organization, however, it represented several groups in the Netherlands. Both organizations were decidedly feminist in origin, but took up 'classic' human rights cases during the seventies, thus occupying the space between the women's and human rights movements.

[4] For a recent study on the IWY conference of 1975, see: Jocelyn Olcott, *International Women's Year: The Greatest Consciousness-Raising Event in History* (Oxford, 2017).

Origins of the organizations

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) was founded in 1915 in the Netherlands after the International Women's Congress in The Hague brought together women from warring parties in World War I in a neutral country to discuss peace. As Harriet Hyman Alonso argues, some version of feminism was part of WILPF from the start. The women at the Congress did not only want peace, but equality with men as well and the newly formed organization adopted this position in its platform. Jane Addams, an American, was appointed WILPF's first international president and intense lobbying of political leaders by the members, including traveling all over Europe to do so, began right away. Addams and other WILPF leaders framed peace as particularly a woman's issue, as there were 'things upon which women are more sensitive than men, and one of these is the treasuring of human life.' They argued that the existing peace movement was too male-dominated, missing a much-needed woman's perspective.[5]

WILPF never defined peace as simply the absence of war, but as a broader set of conditions concerning economic, political and social equality. After the war ended and after women won the right to vote in the US in 1920 and in many European countries, WILPF's focus broadened to include activities ranging from battling famine, to protesting sexual violence, colonialism and racism. Disarmament remained a central tenet of WILPF's philosophy and the organization actively lobbied the newly formed League of Nations to that end. After World War II, WILPF's history of involvement with the League and its standing as an international organization earned it consultative status with the League of Nations'

[5] Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Peace as a Women's Issue*, *A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women's Rights,* (Syracuse, 1993), 60-69.

successor, the United Nations (UN). This granted the group access to the halls of power and cemented its place as one of few representatives of the women's rights movement at the UN.[6]

In the United States the national section of WILPF could not count on this kind of access after 1945. With the onset of the Cold War, the WILPF became the target of McCarthyite anticommunist sentiments. Its anti-war agenda, contacts with 'suspicious' organizations, like the American League Against War and Fascism, and its criticism of US economic policies meant it was the target of red-baiting and its leadership constantly felt pressured to defend themselves against charges of communism. This fear of being attacked from the outside caused suspicion and hysteria inside the organization, with members distrusting each other and leadership culling suspected communists from the WILPF. The anxiety was not unfounded, however, as the later release of FBI-documents showed the Bureau surveilled multiple WILPF branches. Various members had to appear before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), the Congressional body that examined charges of communism, in this period as well. However, while the WILPF was certainly affected by McCarthyism, including in its ability to recruit new members, it survived the red scare of the 1950s, was never blacklisted and remained active throughout the decade.[7]

The social landscape for feminism in the Netherlands in the 1950s looked very different. Since the early twentieth century, Dutch society had been organized through the principle of 'pillarization,' a vertical segregation through political and denominational 'pillars.' The four pillars in the Netherlands were Catholic, Protestant, Socialist and Liberal or general. Each pillar had its own political parties and institutions, such as schools, unions, newspapers, broadcasting companies and sports clubs. The religious pillars were still very influential, with about half the population attending church weekly, a higher percentage than in the rest of Northern Europe. While the 1950s in the Netherlands were a time of

[6] Gertrude Bussey, Margaret Tims, *Pioneers for Peace: Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1965* (London, 1980).
[7] Alonso, *Peace as a Women's Issue,* 157-193

conservatism, just like in the US, the political landscape also included an active communist party and although it was not the most popular, being a member was not illegal.[8]

The onset of the global 1960s, marked by secularization, youth counterculture and a focus on the individual, had its effects in the Netherlands too and caused the unraveling of pillarization and decreasing influence of religious organizations. As in much of the Western European world, the 1960s in the Netherlands saw both a period of prosperity, after years of postwar rebuilding, and the emergence of a lively protest culture. Second wave feminism was one movement among many that challenged existing paradigms in the Netherlands. Much like Betty Friedan is often credited for setting off second wave feminism in the US, Joke Smit provided a manifesto for Dutch feminists with the publication of her 1967 1967 essay *'The discontent of women'*. She argued that for most women 'emancipation is stuck in the passive stage: opportunities have appeared on the horizon, but that is it: just like fifty years ago they are housewives and have no further aspirations.' Smit criticized the expectations society put on women, that they were meant to be married and have children, and argued this prevented women from having any ambition in their education or career. Instead women should take advantage of the latest innovations in oral contraception, plan their family, get on the job market and claim their place in society.[9] After the overwhelming response Smit received to her essay, she and Hedy d'Ancona founded one of the most influential feminist groups of the decade, 'Man, Woman, Society'(MVM), in 1968. It represented the liberal feminist school of thought and looked to the National Organization for Women (NOW) in the US as an example.

Smit's essay appeared the same year that religious political parties failed to win an absolute majority in parliament for the first time in Dutch history. While the influence of individual churches and institutions related to those churches waned in the 1960s, depillarization drove them closer together and

[8] James C. Kennedy, *A Concise History of the Netherlands* (Utrecht, 2017).
[9] Joke Smit, 'Het onbehagen bij de vrouw', *De Gids,* 9:10 (1967)267-281. Translations mine.

Dutch ecumenism grew stronger in this decade.[10] The Council of Churches of the Netherlands, for instance, the Dutch section of the World Council of Churches, was founded in 1968 and included fourteen different denominations. The spirit of cooperation extended to the dozens of religious women's organizations too. Several of the groups that would later make up VKW began to work together in other ways in this period.

While VKW had not yet been founded, the WILPF in the US was already engaging with the human rights discourse in the 1960s. Throughout the postwar period the WILPF had supported the development of treaties, covenants and bodies dedicated to the upholding of human rights at the UN. Partly because of WILPF's close connection to the world organization, human rights were on its agenda from the UN's inception and remained an important part of its work. WILPF's US chapter included a national human rights division, part of its UN committee, that worked mostly with and at the UN. Gertrud Baer, one of the founding members of the international WILPF, became UN consultant for the organization in 1950 and lobbied for stronger human rights mechanisms in Geneva. As it became clear over the decade after the war that human rights treaties were not delivering on their lofty ideals, Baer became increasingly frustrated. At this time, she was representing both WILPF and the International League for the Rights of Man, of which she was a board member, in Geneva. The League was one of the oldest human rights organizations, but not very successful in the 1950s and 1960s, as Jan Eckel argues, because of its small size and inability to professionalize, the concentration of its work on the UN and because its goals were at odds with US domestic political scene.[11]

While WILPF's membership was much larger and the organization more professionalized than the League's, it too evidently lacked success with human rights lobbying. The Cold War had definitively broken out by 1950 and the struggle extended to the meeting rooms at the Palace of Nations in Geneva and Turtle

[10] James C. Kennedy, *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw: Nederland in de jaren zestig* (Amsterdam, 1995) 90-94.
[11] Jan Eckel, 'The International League for the Rights of Man, Amnesty International, and the Changing Fate of Human Rights Activism from the 1940s through the 1970s,' *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, 4:2 (2013) 185.

Bay, New York City. Neither the US nor the Soviet Union was willing to create strong enforcing mechanisms or vote for more rights covenants after the adoption of the UDHR and it would take until 1966 before the proposed 'bill of rights' covenants were adopted.[12] Baer, writing to the League for the Rights of Man director Roger Baldwin in 1951, exclaimed 'I have the full responsibility for the WILPF in this sorry matter of "Human" "Rights" which seem to disappear in the degree as they are being discussed. What a state of affairs! Ridiculous! And a shame and disgrace for every one of us.'[13]

In the 1960s human rights activism for the WILPF meant creating both an international legal framework to safeguard human rights through the UN and national laws protecting rights. The organization had a separate national human rights division, chaired by Meta Riseman, long-time WILPF member and former national president. The grassroots organizing tactics for specific cases of human rights violations abroad that organizations like Amnesty International successfully used a decade later were not yet in view for the WILPF, or any other organization at the time. Human rights were associated with the UN and the WILPF's connection to the world organization meant it saw human rights in this manner as well, an issue of international law enshrined in UN documents.

However, flowing from this focus on legal developments, WILPF did frame the civil rights struggle in the US as a human rights issue. By 1960 the General Assembly of the UN was discussing conventions banning racial discrimination and it adopted precursors to the 1965 Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination. The connection with the domestic situation in the US was easily made and Riseman continuously did so. In a letter to branch chairmen from 1963 Riseman discussed the state of human rights in the US and the UN rights conventions, talking exclusively about segregation and other forms of discrimination against African Americans. While WILPF had a separate civil rights section, the

[12] Roger Normand and Sarah Zaidi, *Human Rights at the UN: The Political History of Universal Justice*, (Indiana, 2008) 197-242.
[13] Letter from Getrud Baer to Roger Baldwin, February 27, 1951, box 5, International League for Human Rights archive, New York Public Library, New York, hereafter cited as: ILHR.

human rights division often worked on the same issues. In 1961, for instance, the human rights division set out to help imprisoned Freedom Riders, civil rights activists who protested the segregation of buses in the South, by spreading correct information about them and countering the negative and incorrect publicity the actions attracted.[14]

Riseman's preoccupation with legal instruments meant that after 1965, when the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act had been passed in the US, the focus of the human rights division shifted away from civil rights. In 1965 the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination and a year later it adopted the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. From then on Riseman's human rights division concentrated mostly on lobbying to get the US government to ratify these treaties. The division wrote lawmakers to convince them to vote for ratification of human rights conventions, designed information packets for WILPF members and others about ratification, circulated petitions and tried to drum up media attention for the issue.[15]

So, while the WILPF was agitating for human rights throughout the two decades after the UDHR was adopted, its work was narrowly focused on legal instruments, both national and international. Its work was more akin to that of the International League for the Rights of Man and less to that of organizations like Amnesty International, which achieved mass appeal in the 1970s. It did not connect US foreign policy, for instance concerning the war in Vietnam, to human rights in this period. WILPF's strong connection with the UN, as an NGO with consultative status, placed it in an elite position of direct access to discussions

[14] 'To state chairmen of WILPF branches or local branches concerned (if the state is not organized),' August, 1961 and 'Human Rights USA – Yesterday – Today – Tomorrow, by Meta Riseman,' June, 1963, folder Human Rights, Division of, 1960-1969, box 6, A4, part 2, DG 043, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Records, 1915-current, Swarthmore Peace Collection, Swarthmore, hereafter cited as: WILPF.

[15] 'Report to annual meeting, Waukesha, Wisconsin, June 10-14, 1970, by Meta Riseman, human rights coordinator,' 1970, folder annual meetings 1970, box 23, A2, part 1, WILPF and 'Report to annual meeting, Atlanta, Georgia, June 26-30, 1969, by Meta Riseman, human rights coordinator' 1969, folder annual meetings 1969, box 23, A2, part 1, WILPF.

about human rights, but also limited its ambitions for human rights activism to the development of international and national law at the highest political level.

This changed abruptly in 1973. On September 11, 1973, democratically elected socialist President Salvador Allende of Chile was overthrown in a military coup d'état by General Augusto Pinochet. The military junta soon showed its colors and started stifling freedom of speech, arresting, killing and disappearing opponents and torturing prisoners. Though hard evidence for the involvement of the US was lacking at the time, it was clear to most observers that the White House at least tacitly supported the coup. President Nixon and his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger preferred a right-wing regime, oppressive though it may be, to a socialist government in the Western hemisphere, for fear of increasing Soviet influence. News of the coup, however, sparked protests all over the world and proved a strong catalyst for human rights activism on both the grassroots and government level in the US and the Netherlands.[16]

Human rights in the 1970s

The US WILPF section was extremely concerned about the situation in Chile as well, not only because of the human rights violations of the junta itself, but also because the US was heavily involved. It compared the case of Chile to the war in Vietnam as an example of US imperialism and criticized not only US recognition and support of the Pinochet regime after the coup, but also US meddling in the economic affairs of the Allende government 'in conspiracy with large multinational corporations,' in hopes of destabilizing it.[17] While WILPF's first policy statements did not frame Chile as a case of human rights

[16] For US involvement in the coup see: Peter Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability*, (New York, 2003), for Congressional activism on Chile see: Barbara J. Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue: The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s* (Cambridge, 2014).
[17] Resolutions, October, 1973, folder: National Board Meeting, 26-28 October, 1973, box 24, A2, Part 1, WILPF.

violations, within a few months the women of WILPF started to use the language of human rights when referring to Chile, in tandem with other organizations and with the US Congress. It combined this new framework with traditional areas of activism for the WILPF: a commitment to disarmament and criticism of US economic policies, capitalism and the military-industrial complex. The socialist Allende regime and its innovative economic policies had been and attractive experiment for the WILPF, making US economic intervention there all the more infuriating. Furthermore, the US was now delivering arms to the Pinochet regime to help it consolidate its rule.

As reports of violations started to come out, the WILPF began adopting tactics used widely by human rights NGOs in the 1970s. The policy committee started drawing up letters to Senators, Congressmen and to the State Department asking for investigations into US intervention in Chile.[18] The program and action committee designed leaflets promoting a boycott of Chilean wines and planned picketing actions at banks extending credit to the Chilean government and demonstrations by Chilean ships in the Philadelphia harbor.[19] WILPF also strengthened contacts with Chilean women and activists, such as Isabel and Beatriz Allende, daughters of former president Salvador Allende, who visited the US in 1974 sponsored by, amongst others, the WILPF.[20]

The most striking action WILPF took on Chile, however, was the ten-day fact minding mission the US office sent to the country in February 1974. WILPF was not the first or the last organization to send its people to Chile to gauge the human rights situation under Pinochet. In November 1973, Amnesty International had sent a group to investigate the status of political prisoners in Chile, finding ample evidence of torture and wrongful imprisonment and making headlines with their report. Amnesty's group,

[18] Nightletters sent from WILPF National Office, September 19, 1973, folder: policy committee 1973-1974 correspondence, box 13a, A4, part 2, WILPF.
[19] Chile Program Proposal, April 19, 1974, folder: Program and Action Committee 1973-1975, box 15, A4, part 2, WILPF.
[20] Letter from Caroline Warren to WILPF chairpersons, folder: Chile: Beatriz Allende, 1973-1974, box 15, A6, WILPF.

however, consisted of only men and WILPF argued that was a woefully inadequate approach to obtaining an accurate representation of the human rights situation in Chile.[21]

The WILPF's organizational structure meant that national offices were responsible for holding their own governments accountable, not foreign governments. However, because Chile did not have a WILPF section of its own and because the US national section was critical of US policy towards Chile, it was the US section that undertook the trip to Chile. Kay Camp, who had been national president from 1967 to 1971 and was vice-chair of the International Secretariat at the time, took the lead and five other women joined: Kay Cole from the San Francisco chapter, Evelyn Mauss, chair of the US WILPF UN committee, Dorothy M. McCarter, chair of the Massachusetts chapter, Pearl Shamis, former chair of the Miami chapter and Charlotte Ryan, WILPF member and member of the Massachusetts Coalition for Human Rights. Three women of the group were fluent in Spanish and three of them had lived in Chile at some point, making them more than equipped to undertake the research.[22]

As the delegation of a women's organization, Kay Camp and her colleagues chose their destinations purposefully. The most important visit they made was to a women's prison in Santiago, where the delegation 'was swamped by women eager to describe their treatment, including repeated rapes and a variety of tortures while detained at other centers.'[23] The report the delegation wrote about the mission, 'Chile: State of War,' discussed not only the political conditions in the country, but also the social and economic circumstances. The report mentioned the high inflation and unemployment under the junta, causing hunger and deprivation, and the reversal of economic measure taken under the Allende government. It dedicated a specific section to women, in the 'social conditions' chapter, and testimony from female prisoners of 'violations of human rights,' including many cases of rape and other sexual

[21] Letter to Luis Reque from Janet Neuman, July 11, 1974, folder: Chile: Beatriz Allende, box 15, A6, WILPF.
[22] WILPF delegation to Chile, February, 1974, folder: visit to Chile as member of WILPF delegation, box 19, A2, part 3G, WILPF.
[23] WILPF, 'Chile: State of War, Eyewitness Report,' (Philadelphia, 1974).

violence. The WILPF's discussion of the situation of Chile, then, was a lot more comprehensive than Amnesty International's, not only because of the inclusion of women's testimony, but also because of the broader range of conditions it considered. The WILPF delegation discussed its findings with Amnesty International and much of the information it gathered in the women's prison ended up in Amnesty International's final report as well, but Amnesty steered clear of mentioning any economic or social changes under the junta.[24] Kay Camp testified before Congress and before the UN human rights commission to report the WILPF's findings.

After the fact-finding mission, Chile remained an important item on the WILPF's agenda. For about two years after the trip, the board at its biannual meetings and the executive committee at its more frequent meetings would put out resolutions on Chile as one of the first issues discussed. Kay Camp and others in the WILPF kept corresponding with Chileans, lobbying politicians and sending letters to the Chilean embassy and government. In March 1974 WILPF members attended a Conference on Solidarity with Chile in Chicago to discuss proposals for action with other NGOs, most of which were small committees dedicated specifically to Chile.[25] The WILPF also developed a strong relationship with Isabel Letelier, the wife of Orlando Letelier, a Chilean economist and diplomat who was later assassinated in Washington D.C. by secret agents of the Pinochet regime.

In search of international solidarity

The Netherlands was an early and enthusiastic adopter of the human rights discourse. In 1973 the social-democratic Den Uyl government, usually considered the most left-wing government the Netherlands has ever had, came to power. Ministers Jan Pronk and Max van der Stoel, for development

[24] Report: Chile: State of War, 1974, box 23, folder: rough draft of Chile report 1974, A2, part 3G, WILPF.
[25] Report on national conference on Chile solidarity, 1974, folder: Attendance by WILPF delegates (4) at National Conference on Chile Solidarity, Chicago (IL), March 30-31, 1974, box 2, A4, part 3, WILPF.

cooperation and foreign policy, were both strongly committed to human rights considerations and actively injected them into their policies. The reasons for this Dutch turn to human rights have been much debated among historians. Malcontent and Baudet argue one of the causes was the collapse of pillarization, which robbed political parties of their identity and forced them to turn towards foreign policy as a way to reestablish it.[26] Another explanation lies in the notion the Netherlands had of itself as a 'guiding country' which could take the lead in matters of international law and cooperation due to its small size and supposed humanitarian impulses. When the Netherlands' importance in world affairs declined after its colonies became independent, the idea resurfaced and Dutch policymakers incorporated human rights in their moral vocabulary.

Historians of human rights in the 1970s have almost exclusively focused on developments in Dutch foreign policy, ignoring the huge grassroots appeal the discourse had and the developments this triggered. As Bastiaan Bouwman has shown, the Dutch section of Amnesty International, the most important human rights organization at the time, was founded in 1968 and counted 7000 members by 1972. This made it the largest national section, not only in relative, but in absolute terms. By 1977, about one in five of Amnesty's total 180.000 members was Dutch, a significant number considering the Netherlands had a population of only fourteen million.[27] Highly publicized human rights cases of the decade, such as the violations by the Pinochet regime in Chile, gained a lot of attention in the Netherlands. Solidarity with Chile sparked the foundation of new NGOs such as the 'Chile Committee' (Chili Komitee), exclusively aimed at

[26] Peter Malcontent, Floribert Baudet, 'The Dutchman's Burden? Nederland en de internationale rechtsorde in de twintigste eeuw,' in: Bob de Graaff, Duco Hellema and Bert van der Zwan ed., *De Nederlandse buitenlandse politiek in de twintigste eeuw* (Amsterdam, 2003), Peter Malcontent, *Op kruistocht in de derde wereld: De reacties van de Nederlandse regering op ernstige en stelselmatige schendingen van fundamentele mensenrechten in ontwikkelingslanden, 1973-1981* (Utrecht, 1998).

[27] Bastiaan Bouwman, 'Outraged, yet moderate and impartial: The rise of Amnesty International in the Netherlands in the 1960s and 1970s,' *Low Countries Historical Review*, 132:4 (2017) 58.

protesting the Chilean junta, while similar groups supporting Argentinians in their struggle against an oppressive government were active in the late 1970s.[28]

In 1975 the human rights discourse was gaining ever more traction and second wave feminism was in full swing in both the US and the Netherlands. A small group of Dutch women started an organization that straddled these two major developments of the 1970s. 'Vrouw, Kerk, Tweederde Wereld' or 'Woman, Church and the Developing World' (VKW) was 'inspired by activities surrounding the Women's Year 1975,' which had brought women together to 'search for the shaping of international solidarity with women in developing countries.'[29] As Jocelyn Olcott has argued, the UN International Women's Year (IWY) and especially its main conference in Mexico City fostered greater transnational connections and understanding among women's organizations worldwide. Although the women who started VKW came together before that international conference took place, they participated in IWY activities organized in the Netherlands.[30]

The Dutch government had appointed the 'National Committee for International Women's Year' to organize such activities and gave it a budget of two million guilders (about 800.000 dollars). Half of that the committee divided over other organizations to sponsor their IWY related activities, while the other half was spent on a big conference to take place over three weeks in May and June, before the international conference in Mexico. In the months before the conference the committee also published four issues of a magazine about women's emancipation.[31]

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[28] Mariana Perry, ''With a little help from my friends': The Dutch solidarity movement and the Chilean struggle for democracy,' *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 101 (2016) 75-96.
[29] 'Verslag van werkzaamheden over de periode Okt. '76/Aug. '77,' 1977, box 1, Archive Stichting Werkgroep Vrouw, Kerk, Tweederde Wereld, Internationaal Archief voor de Vrouwenbeweging in Atria, Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History, Amsterdam. Cited hereafter as: VKW.
[30] Jocelyn Olcott, *International Women's Year: The greatest consciousness-raising event in history* (Oxford, 2017).
[31] Zijwijzer, 1975, box 81, Archive Nationaal Comité Internationaal Jaar van de Vrouw, Internationaal Archief voor de Vrouwenbeweging in Atria, Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History, Amsterdam. Cited hereafter as: NC.

The board of the committee was not officially installed until November of 1974 and although women's organizations scrambled to get their share of the funding available, so many the committee could hardly handle them, various groups criticized the way it was run. Aside from the committee being created so late, right before International Women's Year was about to start, and grumblings about the small amount of budget it had, organizations were critical of the content of the committee's work as well.[32] The fact that half of the available money would go to a conference was not appreciated by all, especially since this was decided before the committee was even up and running.[33] A group of more progressive, left-wing organizations, including Dolle Mina, a radical, socialist feminist group, and COC, the largest gay rights organization of the Netherlands, made this clear in a letter to the committee, arguing they had been left out of the decision making process.[34]

From another side of the spectrum a group of religious organizations banded together in criticizing the committee as well. With the Dutch chapter of the Young Women's Christian Organization (YWCA) in the lead, seven groups, whose presidents already regularly met, wrote to the committee they were not happy with its plans and that they wanted to meet and give their input. Two of these organizations were later represented in VKW as well.[35] The groups thought their perspective as Christian women's groups, including their international outlook, was not represented in the Committee.[36] A conference of Catholic organizations called for more attention to the developing world in IWY as well.[37] Contrary to the Dolle

[32] 'Nationaal Comité in stilte geïnstalleerd, 'Jaar van de Vrouw' nog in nevelen gehuld,' *De Telegraaf*, November 13, 1974, available at www.delpher.nl.
[33] Emmy van Overeen, 'Jaar van Vrouw wordt laat geopend,' *NRC Handelsblad,* 12-04-1974.
[34] 'Brief aan het Nationaal Komité voor het Jaar van de Vrouw, van Dolle Mina en anderen,' box 136, February 27, 1975, NC.
[35] 'Brief aan Nationaal Comité voor het Jaar van de Vrouw, van YWCA en anderen,' March 20, 1975, box 136, NC.
[36] 'Notulen van het Presidentieel Overleg,' March 11, 1975, box 148, Young Women's Christian Association Netherlands, Internationaal Archief voor de Vrouwenbeweging in Atria, Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History, Amsterdam. Cited hereafter as: YWCA.
[37] 'Voorrang aan emancipatie vrouw in de derde wereld,' *De Tijd*, August 19, 1974.

Minas and their colleagues, the Christian groups eventually did participate in the conference, the YWCA by working on the 'women and development cooperation' theme.[38]

The conference itself was not considered a success shows that feminists in the Netherlands at this time did not agree on an approach to further women's cause. In January of 1975 an anonymous group of opponents sent out fake letter saying the event was canceled, and although that was not the case, it might have been the better approach. The event was called the 'Emancipade' and held in Utrecht, a larger city in the center of the Netherlands. Most activities were indeed focused on domestic issues, such as abortion legislation and gender roles in Dutch society.[39] Although the committee had expected and budgeted for 300.000 visitors, only 70.000 people showed up.[40] The 'idea box' visitors could put suggestions and comments in gave an idea of the problems people had with the conference. Some found it was too elitist and only targeted women already active in the movement, others criticized the sale of jewelry in the shape of the IWY logo for reaffirming gender stereotypes ('I would have appreciated a ball point pen!'), and yet others simply coordinated their comments by writing 'Women's year: just a Band-Aid' dozens of times, sharing the same pen. Furthermore, multiple visitors mentioned the lack of attention of the developing world at the conference.[41]

The women of VKW, then, were not alone in feeling the need for connection with women from the developing world, even before the conference in Mexico ever took place. The group they started drew its members from ten existing Christian women's organizations of different denominations, mostly reformed or Calvinist and one Catholic, seven of which had their own stand at the Emancipade.[42] VKW was registered as a foundation and therefore could not have paying members, it simply consisted of the board and working groups. Although the board was comprised of women from other organizations, it was very

[38] '*Contour* 1975, Equality, Development, Peace: Internationaal Jaar van de Vrouw 1975,' box 280, YWCA, 22.
[39] Emancipade Program, 1975, box 111, Nationaal Comité and flyer, 1975, box 37, NC.
[40] 'Raming verlies van Emancipade ruim 7 ton,' *De Volkskrant*, October 6, 1975.
[41] Several suggestions in the idea box, 1975, box 79, NC.
[42] Emancipade Program, 1975, box 111, NC.

much meant to operate as its own, independent institution, not simply a cooperative body.[43] Its funding came from subsidies granted by the Dutch National Committee for Development strategy (NCO), a government body established in 1970 in the context of the UN second Development Decade meant to raise consciousness and stimulate development cooperation. It was and is quite common for Dutch NGOs to receive a large part of their funding this way, as relations between the Dutch government and NGOs have always been relatively close and collaborative.

The women who made up the board, as mentioned, had been active in other organizations before joining VKW. Most of them were very involved in their religious community, educated and from fairly well-off families. The chair, for instance, Cox van Heemstra, was a member of a Dutch noble family and Audrey Hepburn's first cousin once removed. She had lived in Africa for seven years and written two books about the experience, one of which dealt with the position of women in Africa.[44] Mieneke Bavinck-Ubbink, the policy secretary, was another member from a religious, international background. Both her father and great-uncle were celebrated theologians and she had grown up in Indonesia, where her parents did missionary work.[45] Two of the ten organizations participating in VKW were focused specifically on missionary work and many of the others were familiar with it, so working across borders was nothing new for most of the members of VKW.

What was new was the framing of this transnational work as human rights activism. When VKW was founded, the group started meeting with women from a wide range of countries about diverse topics, which was supposed to function as a 'learning process' and 'exploration' for the group to define its goals and structuring in its first year of existence. This included talks with people from Turkey, Cameroon and South Africa and experts on developing countries or regions, but also discussions about socio-economic

[43] 'Evaluatie, doelstelling, doelgroep en werkwijze van VKW,' April 28, 1978, box 1, VKW.
[44] Genealogy available at: https://www.genealogieonline.nl/west-europese-adel/I99149.php C.M. C.M. van Heemstra, *Je zult maar vrouw zijn: haar rol in een kleiner wordende wereld: geschetst naar ervaringen in Afrika* (Baarn, 1974) and C.M. Heemstra, *Thuis in Afrika: Zeven Jaar in Afrika* (Utrecht, 1970).
[45] John Bolt, James D. Bratt, Paul J. Visser ed., *The J.H. Bavinck Reader* (Grand Rapids, 2013).

rights like health care and education. Inclusion of these last topics within a human rights framework was a significant departure from what human rights organizations typically saw as within their purview and shows how VKW immediately started altering human rights language to fit its goals. At the end of this first 'experimental' year, members of the group were generally positive about its direction and they decided on a plan for the coming year: The theme of 1978 would be 'human rights.'[46]

Turning away from human rights

While VKW was just starting to define its human rights activism, the WILP had already moved away from the discourse. During the years when the human rights violations in Chile were a major concern for the WILPF, approximately from 1973 to 1975, the organization was also trying to deal with internal problems. Membership of the US section was declining rapidly, with a total membership of 9255 in 1972 and only 6799 in May 1973.[47] In addition, the organization was aging without attracting new, younger members, and it was not very diverse, consisting mostly of white women. The membership committee at this time was led by Pat Samuel, who took the job in 1971, but the 'retired' former chair Eleanor Fowler still came in about three days a week to consult and, as a veteran WILPF'er, was a major influence on the committee.[48] The committee was searching for solutions to attract both young and black women to WILPF and brainstormed about what would possibly make WILPF a more interesting organization for that demographic.

During these years a reorientation of WILPF policy crystallized that was based on three themes, all tied together: economic equality, feminism and disarmament. The new generation of feminists, born after

[46] 'Verslag van werkzaamheden over de periode Okt. '76/Aug. '77,' 1977, box 1, VKW.
[47] Report to the WILP board by Dorothy Steffens, October 24, 1973, folder: national board meeting Philadelphia, Oct. 26-28, 1973, box 24, A2, part 2, WILPF.
[48], Short article on Eleanor Fowler, 'Send no Rocking Chairs,' 1972, box 4a, A1, WILPF.

World War II in a world of relative peace, was more concerned with domestic issues of inequality than with the prevention of war abroad. 'Many young women,' the membership committee argued, 'want to get jobs or go back to school,' and WILPF should develop programming to reach them.[49] The Program and Action committee proposed developing 'leaflets on such subjects as "Uncle Sam wants you – back in the kitchen"- effects of a high unemployment economy on women, which includes putting pressure on them to return to the home' and discussion papers on socialist-feminism, women's work in the home and sex-stereotyping in jobs and school.[50]

The attention to gender based economic inequality connected WILPF to other modern feminist issues as well. The board decided in late 1974, for instance, to work for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), one of the NOW's main agenda points at that time. The constitutional amendment called for full social, economic and political gender equality and passed Congress and the Senate by 1972. Getting the required number of state ratifications, however, proved to be difficult after Phyllis Schlafly, a conservative activist, launched a strong campaign against the ERA.[51] One of the problems Schlafly had with the amendment was that it would open up the possibility that women could be drafted to the military. While that was of course at odds with WILPF's pacifist inclinations, the board argued that gender equality, and the coalition with liberal feminists, were more important than keeping women out of the military.[52] In addition to support for the ERA, WILPF also started putting out supportive statements on social issues like the right to abortion and LGBTQIA rights.[53]

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[49] Notes on the November 5 brainstorming session on membership and program, 1975, folder: Membership and Extension Committee: meeting minutes and reports 1970-1979, box 9, A4, part 2, WILPF.
[50] A proposal to the national board, women in the economy: Program for WILPF in the coming year, October, 1975, folder: program planning 1970-1979, Program and Action committee, box 1, H6, WILPF.
[51] For a detailed history on the struggle for ratification of the ERA in the 1970s, see: Marjorie J. Spruill, *Divided We Stand: The Battle Over Women's Rights and Family Values that Polarized American Politics* (New York, 2017).
[52] Letter from WILPF executive director Melva Mueller to Eleanor Smeal of NOW, June 19, 1978, folder: correspondence with coalitions, 1977-1979, box 14, H4, WILPF.
[53] Resolutions passed at the meeting, June, 1977, folder: biennial national meeting, Miami, June 23-28 1977, box 25, A2, part 1, WILPF.

To tie together economic and feminist issues, however, WILPF decided to rebrand its activism by going back to its traditional focus: disarmament. In a letter to the board, in preparation for their session on membership, Eleanor Fowler set out her ideas to acquire more members:

'As I see it WILPF is facing a crisis. We have been losing members and branches and many groups not yet written off have been inactive for a year or more. […] Our basic problem is an aging membership. We need to try all sorts of techniques to interest younger women. I see a real gap between the objectives of the women's movement (NOW, Women's Political Caucus, many lesser groups) and the traditional peace organizations. I think WILPF could bridge that gap and bring many younger women into WILPF in the process.'[54]

The board agreed and from late 1975 made disarmament again a central tenet of WILPF activism. This time, however, it framed it as a feminist and economic issue. The billions of dollars spent on arms and the army, the argument went, could contribute to solving all kinds of economic and social problems in the US. WILPF put out a national program titled 'feed the cities, not the Pentagon' and Eleanor Fowler set up a workshop at the national meeting called 'bread and roses,' both referring to this logic. Fowler pointed out that WILPF went further than other women's organizations in trying to change the economic system, as 'NOW and the Women's Political Caucus on the whole are concerned with women getting ahead in the present competitive rat race,' while the 'YWCA and some of the religious groups are closer to our way of thinking, though I doubt they go quite as far.'[55]

The WILPF's ideas about the economic system in the US made it a logical ally for women's groups from the Soviet Union. The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) had a cordial relationship with the women of WILPF and invited the group to their World Congress of Women in East-

[54] Statement to the membership session of the WILPF national board, from Eleanor Fowler to the national board, September 10, 1976, folder: national board meeting, September 17-19. 1976, box 25, A2, part 1, WILPF.
[55] Eleanor Fowler, 'Bread and Roses: Women and Economic Change,' June 23, 1977, folder: biennial national meeting, Miami, June 23-28, 1977, box 25, A2, part 1, WILP.

Berlin in November 1975. The Congress was the socialist answer to the IWY Conference in New Mexico earlier that year and drew 2000 women from all over the world. The US WILPF chartered a plane, called it their 'bird of peace' and attended the conference with a small delegation led by Kay Camp.[56] Although many socialist women's organizations framed women's rights as human rights at the Congress, this was not the approach the WILPF took.[57] Instead, it focused on disarmament and Kay Camp took part in a commission on that topic.[58] The WILPF was part of the US preparatory committee for the Conference as well and co-organized another workshop on disarmament with the WIDF in May of 1975, at the UN in New York, in the context of International Women's Year. In spite of WILPF's consultative status with the UN, it was a lot more involved with planning the congress in Berlin than it was with the UN sponsored one in Mexico City. It occupied a unique space between socialist women's organizations and liberal feminists of the US, which it still tried actively to bind to the organization.

To do so, it added a final element to its focus on disarmament. In addition to tying disarmament to economic advancement for women, the WILPF framed militarism as a problem of masculinity. WILPF members participated in the 'bread and roses' workshop Fowler had scheduled at the national meeting in June 1977, to discuss 'ways of building links between WILPF and the feminist movement.' A member from the Baltimore branch reported how they had unsuccessfully tried for years to get a workshop on peace accepted at the Baltimore Women's fair, but when it submitted it under the title 'Militarism as a Macho disease' that year, finally succeeded, 'probably because it used language familiar to feminists and appeared to relate to their mainstream concerns.'[59]

[56] WILPF News, WILPF national board meeting October 11-13, 1974, folder: involvement with the US preparatory committee for the World Congress for IWY, 1974-1975, box 15, A2, part 3G, WILPF.
[57] Donert, 'Whose Utopia?,' in: Eckel, Moyn ed., *The Breakthrough* (2014).
[58] World Congress in Berlin program, 1975, folder: involvement with the US preparatory committee for the World Congress for IWY, 1974-1975, box 15, A2, part 3G, WILPF.
[59] Bread and Roses workshop follow-up, August 16, 1977, folder: biennial national meeting, Miami, June 23-28, 1977, box 25, A2, part 1, WILP.

By tying feminism and economic advancement into disarmament, WILPF had found a tightly packaged way to frame its message and it showed in the membership numbers, which went up significantly after 1977.[60] It did not leave room, however, for human rights language. The Program and Action committee voiced this concern in 1979, pointing out that 'there are other issues with which WIL is and should be concerned but which do not fit under our two main priority headings,' including racism and sexism, the environmental crisis and human rights.[61]

With the demise of the human rights discourse in the WILPF, activism concerning Chile took a backseat to other issues as well. After 1976, the Pinochet regime did no longer figure prominently in national board statements and resolutions, but was demoted to smaller committees and ad hoc actions. Kay Camp, member of the WILPF fact-finding mission to Chile and very active on the issue ever since, became international WILPF president in 1975 and most of her portfolio changed to disarmament. In 1977 she and Dorothy McCarter received a letter from Anita Araya, a Chilean woman and activist they had corresponded with for years, saying 'I do not know why you are all so silent. Meanwhile, I have been writing to you often.'[62]

Even when Jimmy Carter started his term as President and propelled the popularity of the human rights discourse even by making it a central tenet of his foreign policy, the WILPF did not return to the language. Though the US section occasionally sent a letter about Chile to the Carter government, most of its lobbying efforts concentrated on the second round of Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT-II) between the US and the USSR.[63] WILPF paid virtually no attention to certain new human rights cases, like Argentina, even though the situation there was very similar to the one in Chile and policymakers and activists often

[60] Report on membership, December 18, 1979, folder: Membership and Extension Committee: meeting minutes and reports 1970-1979, box 9, A4, part 2, WILPF.
[61] Priorities proposal – working draft for biennial, June, 1979, folder: program planning 70-79, box 1, H6, WILPF.
[62] Letter from Anita Araya to Kay Camp and Peg McCarter, January 22, 1977, folder: correspondence with people in Chile, 1974-1979, box 1, A2, part 3G, WILPF.
[63] Letter from Ruth Sillman, WILP, to President Carter, folder: US section representative to the UN: Ruth Sillman, 1975-1977, box 19, A4, part 2, WILPF.

mentioned the two countries in the same breath. Other cases that were high profile in the human rights movement, such as government oppression in El Salvador and apartheid in South Africa, it did address, but framed as disarmament problems, because the US supported the countries by selling them arms.[64]

Making women visible

As the WILPF was moving away from human rights, VKW was firmly committing to the discourse. In 1978 the group's goals and strategies crystallized and long after the thematic human rights year was over, the women kept framing the problems VKW addressed as human rights issues. It tackled many of the same cases human rights organizations like Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch worked on, but did so from the perspective of women. This meant the organization was interested in human rights violations that specifically affected women, but also in how general human rights violations affected women differently than men. Furthermore, it aimed to establish contacts with women and women's organizations from the countries where violations took place. The board summarized its mission statement in April of that year as 'making women visible.'[65]

It was specifically in the context of VKW's human rights year that the board established a study group on feminism, to explore the connections between the two themes and decide how feminism would inform VKW's activism. As Mieneke Bavinck-Ubbink, who was part of the feminism study group, argued in a paper explaining the necessity of the study group, the organization's activism could be based on either its 'influence', meaning it could organize for practical improvements in other countries such as clean water supplies, or it could be based on solidarity, because 'their problem turns out to be our shared problem.' To get to the bottom of structural inequality between men and women, which was not confined to the

[64] Resolution on El Salvador, folder: Biennial national meeting, Ypsilanti (MI) June 23-27, 1981, box 26, A2, part 1, WILPF.
[65] 'Evaluatie, doelstelling, doelgroep en werkwijze van VKW,' April 28, 1978, box 1, VKW.

developing world, the group would have to study the position of women in the Netherlands as well.[66] The group also turned its focus towards economic issues facing women, discussing for instance the fact that women's labor often went unacknowledged, because it took place within the household.[67]

The group read and discussed works by famous Dutch feminists together, like Joke Smit and Anja Meulenbelt, and talked about a broad spectrum of feminist concerns, from sexual repression to gender roles to labor equality. On more than one occasion the group met in the brand-new women's café in Utrecht, the 'Witches Cauldron,' one of many feminist cafes that popped up during the 1960s and 1970s in the Netherlands. The cafe was founded in 1975 with subsidies from the National Committee for International Women's Year and hosted a feminist publisher, bookstore and foundation as well.[68]

VKW and the feminist study group, then, were quite progressive and more radically feminist than the sum of their parts. The individual organizations that made up VKW, all Christian, espoused a range of perspectives on feminism, some of them quite conservative, and some simply not that concerned with women's emancipation. A few years before, for instance, the seven presidents of Christian women's organizations who met to discuss their views on the National Committee for International Women's Year, some of them later members of VKW, had opened the meeting with a bible verse. They quoted Proverbs 31: 10-31 about 'the wife of noble character,' which describes the perfect housewife.[69] Three years later VKW's feminist study group was discussing the nuclear family as an outdated concept.

The group was very aware of this discrepancy and decided in its first meeting to avoid the word 'feminism' in its external communications for a while, to prevent 'startled responses' or 'thorns.' The group recognized it had to convince the participating organizations that studying feminist theory and the position

[66] Mieneke Bavinck-Ubbink, 'Emancipatie/feminism – waarom nodig voor werkgroep VKW?' box 14, VKW.
[67] 'Verslag van de bijeenkomst van studiegroep 1 – emancipatie en feminisme,' April 6, 1978, box 14, VKW.
[68] E. van Overeem, 'Utrecht krijgt een "heksenkelder,"' *NRC Handelsblad*, July 9, 1975.
[69] 'Notulen van het Presidentieel Overleg,' March 11, 1975, box 148, YWCA.

of women in the Netherlands was crucial for their work with women in the developing world. Bavinck-Ubbink's short paper, they decided, would have to be circulated to explain the group's work.[70]

The women meeting in the Witches Cauldron saw feminism and emancipation as two distinct concepts, defining the first as the 'reevaluation of human values and norms, in such a way that experiences and realities of women are equal to those of men, and that all patterns of behavior that reinforce dependence of the woman on the man are abolished (women's liberation).' Emancipation was 'the awareness of the societally, politically and economically disadvantaged position of women, and the conscious attempts to improve that.'[71] They discussed both concepts in depth, using the literature they read to form their opinions. Especially gender roles and the political-economic structures that supported them were of interest to the group and the members agreed that the classic nuclear family, with a woman confined to the role of housewife, was repressive. They also agreed that a major problem with emancipation was that housewives were 'invisible,' an observation that circled back into VKW's broader goal of 'making women visible.'[72]

During the thematic human rights year VKW increasingly drifted towards work on Latin American countries, in line with broader trends of global human rights activism. It started a separate working group for Latin America which included two members who were part of the feminist working group as well, Margreet Rutgers-Beets and Mieneke Bavinck-Ubbink.[73] The ideas that were developed in the feminist study group informed VKW's goals and strategies for countries like Chile, Argentina and El Salvador. This also meant that although VKW worked on typical human rights cases, it approached the issues entirely differently than human rights NGOs like Amnesty International. After being discussed in the study group, socio-economic issues became very much a part of VKW's human rights activism.

[70] 'Verslag van de bijeenkomst van de studiegroep 'emancipatie-onderzoek,' November 17, 1977, box 14, VKW.
[71] *Idem.*
[72] 'Verslag van de bijeenkomst van studiegroep 1 – emancipatie en feminisme,' April 6, 1978, box 14, VKW.
[73] Letter from Mieneke Bavinck-Ubbink to Regina, March 25, 1981, box 42, VKW.

In a discussion with Chilean women in exile, for instance, the working group on Latin America stressed how breaking gender stereotypes was vital to fighting the Pinochet regime. In its propaganda the junta played with clichés of female 'softness' and 'passiveness' to sell its economic and political programs, while imprisoning women who deviated from that ideal by resisting the regime. Chilean women, VKW argued, were doubly repressed: not only in the way Chilean men were repressed by the government, but also by societal expectations attached to their gender, which the junta in turn exploited even further.[74]

A project VKW undertook together with a Chilean organization, Corporación de Estudios Sociales y Educación (SUR) addressed these issues directly. Work took place in poor neighborhoods on the outskirts of Santiago, where SUR and other NGOs had established soup kitchens or day care centers and had helped reorganize the residents after Pinochet disbanded the democratic neighborhood associations. In addition to this work, VKW and SUR aimed to 'promote the awareness of women as women and as residents of the area' and finding ways to use women's 'daily and emotional experiences' to affect change. Through working groups and study sessions, local women were encouraged to think about their identity, their femaleness, their sexuality, but also their position in the neighborhood and relationship to the state.[75] VKW, then, chose to cooperate with an organization that was working on something more akin to developing work rather than human rights promotion. The choice shows VKW's interpretation of human rights as a lot broader than the mainstream discourse.

Undertaking humanitarian relief work, such as the soup kitchens, and human rights efforts, like promoting democratization, while at the same time actively addressing the gendered aspects of structural inequality and the different impacts of the work on men and women would be called 'gender mainstreaming' today. While VKW lacked the vocabulary, it was promoting strategies that would be

[74] 'Samenkomst Chileense vrouwen in Rotterdam,' box 75, VKW.
[75] 'Vormingsprogramma voor vrouwen uit marginale wijken,' box 122, VKW.

institutionalized at the UN in the 1990s.[76] Scholars and activists hotly debate the success of the approach, but the UN and many NGOs and national governments still actively pursue it.

While VKW maintained its contacts and work with Chilean women and organizations, in 1979 their most visible activity shifted to Argentina. Like Chile, Argentina was ruled by a dictatorship, led by general Jorge Rafael Videla who took power in a military coup in 1976. One of the most egregious abuses the Videla regime committed were the large scale 'disappearances.' Political opponents or suspected leftists would be taken in the night and killed somewhere, without the family ever finding out what happened. In 1977 a group of women with missing children in Buenos Aires started a protest against this type of human rights violation. They walked in a circle on the Plaza de Mayo, in front of the presidential palace, wearing white head scarves symbolizing the diapers of their lost children. They called themselves the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo (Mother of the Plaza de Mayo) and kept up weekly protests to garner international attention.

The mothers' marches achieved the desired effect and Argentina became the object of one of the most intense international human rights campaigns of the decade, both by NGOs and at the UN, second only to Chile. VKW was no exception and in December 1979, the board proposed to the member organizations to put together monthly marches in front of the Argentinian embassy in The Hague, complete with white scarves, to show solidarity with the women in Buenos Aires. The timing was especially relevant, because the Argentinian government was arresting the Madres and preventing their marches. However, the cause of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo had always been especially suited to VKW's own vision on human rights work: both made women visible in a field that tended to overlook them.

It comes as less of a surprise, then, that it was VKW who organized the marches and not one of the many new NGOs in the Netherlands that targeted Argentina alone.[77] VKW's first 'silent march' was

[76] Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), A/CONF.177/20, United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld Library, Dag Repository, available at: http://dag.un.org/

[77] See, for instance, Steun aan Argentijnse Moeders/Support for Argentine Mothers (SAAM), or Solidariteits Komitee Argentinië Nederland/Solidarity Committee Argentina Netherlands (SKAN), or the Dutch chapter of the

held on February 20, 1980 and it was a huge success. The working group for Latin America had hoped to get at least twenty women together each third Thursday of the month, but in the first year between two-hundred and five-hundred showed up at every protest.[78] As the years went on, the demonstrations kept drawing women and small regional women's groups even started to arrange marches in their hometowns. Other organizations were eager to get involved as well, including local chapters of Amnesty International.[79] The Argentinian ambassador could see the white head scarves out his office window every month until 1985, when VKW scaled the marches in The Hague back to once a year and instead increased the number of local marches.[80]

When the 1980 Nobel peace prize buzz began, VKW and several other organizations lobbied for the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo to win it for their courageous and effective activism. While the prize was eventually awarded to an Argentinian it did not got to the Madres, but to Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, a human rights activist who was detained and brutally tortured by the junta for fourteen months. The year after that a fellow Dutch NGO, Central Latinoamericana de Trabajadores (CLAT), approached VKW with the request to support the nomination of Lech Walesa, a Polish activist. The board politely replied that CLAT could no doubt understand that as a women's organization, they 'could not muster much enthusiasm for the nomination of yet another man.'[81]

VKW occupied a unique space between the feminist and human rights movements in the Netherlands. It incorporated ideas and strategies from both movements and developed its own approach to human rights activism. Using modern feminist theory VKW came to the conclusion that women in countries with dictatorial regimes were doubly repressed, not only by their government, but by the

Argentinian Comisión de solidaridad de familiars de presos politicos desaparecidos y muertos en Argentina (CoSoFam).

[78] Letter, 'Aan de besturen van de groeperingen die participeren in VKW,' December 20, 1979, box 42, VKW, and letter to newspaper *Trouw* from M.C. Bavinck-Ubbink, September 22, 1980, box 56, VKW.

[79] 'Aantekeningen gemaakt tijdens het 'overleg Stille Tochten' op 4 november in Amersfoort,' 1980, box 42, VKW.

[80] 'Minder 'Haagse' stille tochten van vrouwen,' *Trouw*, January 18, 1985.

[81] Letter to CLAT, from Ria Hommes-Brouwer, September 25, 1981, box 42, VKW.

patriarchy. VKW finetuned its approach to human rights work according to these conclusions, trying to make women visible. Many years later, similar approaches were institutionalized at the UN during the Beijing Conference, at the urging of women's rights NGOs.

Conclusion

The breakthrough of the human rights discourse in the 1970s influenced both the WILPF and VKW in the US and the Netherlands. The WILPF had always been a proponent of human rights treaties and covenants and agitated for them throughout the post-war period. When human rights became the dominant language to discuss the case of Chile in 1973, the WILPF changed its tack from pursuing legal routes to human rights to pushing the US to change its foreign policy. It adopted tactics from and worked with organizations in the new human rights field, but made sure its perspective as a women's organization stayed front and center of the efforts. VKW enthusiastically adopted a human rights framework for its activism, but similarly amended it to fit its purpose. The women of VKW held in depth discussions on feminist theory and used their conclusions to add what they thought was missing from typical human rights activism: attention to women. WILPF and VKW, then, felt it was necessary for them to make women visible.

Another significant difference between the WILPF and VKW and human rights organizations like Amnesty International was the former's attention to economic issues. While the WILPF and VKW were working on classic cases of violations of civil and political rights, which were almost exclusively addressed in that form in the human rights discourse, they both included violations of economic rights in their concerns, arguing that both forms of rights abuses went hand in hand and especially that repression of women could not be addressed without consideration of their economic and social status.

Both organizations felt the human rights activism that gained popularity in the 1970s was missing something, but they ended up with different solutions to the problem. VKW kept modifying and reframing the human rights discourse to fit its purposes, but the WILPF abandoned it completely. Deciding that human rights was not the right framework to address the WILPF's concerns or to attract a younger membership, the organization changed direction. It made disarmament the central tenet of its activism, connecting it to feminism and economic issues by arguing that militarism was a 'macho-disease' and that every dollar spent on arms could have been used to improve the general economic conditions in the US and the position of women instead.

The story of the WILPF and VKW in the 1970s shows that the idea of a linear development, centered around UN conferences, of the women's rights and human rights connection is too simplistic. Although the WILPF was intimately involved with the UN and had consultative status with the ECOSOC, it decidedly turned away from the human rights discourse after briefly experimenting with it. VKW, on the other hand, had no connection to the UN whatsoever, but decided to make human rights its central theme. Both organizations were critical of existing human rights activism and made the discourse their own, infusing it not only with feminism, but with concern for economic and social rights as well.

Taking a closer look at movements for social justice in the 1970s outside of the classical human rights groups can enhance our understanding of the development of the discourse and of the impact it had on existing movements. It can also alert us to the shortcomings, or perceived shortcomings, of human rights activism. Both the WILPF's and VKW's attitude towards human rights work nuances the idea of an all consuming new human rights rhetoric in the activist community in the 1970s. While the discourse certainly became popular, it was not a panacea.

More research into other organizations, from different countries and continents, with different political leanings and backgrounds, over longer periods of time, will help us to fully understand the entanglement between the two movements, but this essay has provided a small start. Particularly,

broader research could provide an answer to the question why it took so long before women's causes were included in the UN human rights framework and whether that was a fruitful development. The findings here also suggest another interesting avenue for research. Both the WILPF and VKW saw the human rights movement as missing a woman's perspective, suggesting it was gendered in such a way to render women invisible. More research into the gendered aspects of human rights work by both NGOs and governments could provide insight into both the effectiveness of that work and of the attractiveness, or lack thereof, of the discourse with feminist organizations when it first emerged. What is clear, however, is that in the 1970s women's rights were not necessarily human rights and human rights were definitely not yet women's rights.

Abbreviations for archival collections

ILHR	International League for Human Rights archive, New York Public Library, New York.
NC	Nationaal Comité Internationaal Jaar van de Vrouw, Internationaal Archief voor de Vrouwenbeweging in Atria, Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History, Amsterdam.
VKW	Stichting Werkgroep Vrouw, Kerk, Tweederde Wereld, collectie Internationaal Archief voor de Vrouwenbeweging in Atria, Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History, Amsterdam.
WILPF	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Records, 1915-current, Swarthmore Peace Collection, Swarthmore, PA.
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association Netherlands, Internationaal Archief voor de Vrouwenbeweging in Atria, Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History, Amsterdam.

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