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Abstract

This paper evaluates the construction of the rights of human rights defenders within international law and its shortcomings in protecting women. Human rights defenders have historically been defined on the basis of their actions as defenders. However, as Marxist-feminist scholar Silvia Federici contends, women are inherently politicised and, moreover, face obstacles to political action which are invisible to and untouchable by the law. Labour rights set an example of handling such a disadvantaged political position by placing vital importance on workers' right to association and collective action. The paper closes with the suggestion that transposing this construction of rights to women would better protect women as human rights defenders while emphasising their capacity for self-determination in their political actions.

Zusammenfassung

Dieses Papier bewertet die Konstruktion der Rechte von Menschenrechtsverteidigern innerhalb des Völkerrechts und ihre Mängel beim Schutz von Frauen. Menschenrechtsverteidiger wurden in der Vergangenheit auf der Grundlage ihrer Tätigkeit als Verteidiger definiert. Wie die marxistisch-feministische Wissenschaftlerin Silvia Federici behauptet, sind Frauen jedoch von Natur aus politisiert und sehen sich darüber hinaus Hindernissen für politisches Handeln gegenüber, die für das Gesetz unsichtbar und unantastbar sind. Die Arbeitsrechte sind ein Beispiel für den Umgang mit einer derart benachteiligten politischen Position, indem sie dem Recht der Arbeitnehmer auf Vereinigungsfreiheit und kollektive Aktionen entscheidende Bedeutung beimessen. Das Papier schließt mit dem Vorschlag, dass die Übertragung dieser Rechtskonstruktion auf Frauen Frauen als Menschenrechtsverteidigerinnen besser schützen und gleichzeitig ihre Fähigkeit zur Selbstbestimmung in ihrem politischen Handeln betonen würde.

I. Introduction

In the struggle for women's rights, there is a clear catch-22: it is necessary that women fight for women's rights and necessary to have women's rights in order for women to be able to fight. International human rights institutions have generally dealt with this in its two constituent parts, with various instruments (e.g. laws, bodies, mandates) dedicated separately to the issue of women's rights and the issue of human rights defenders (HRDs). More recently, institutions have joined these together in the more intersectional consideration of women human rights defenders (WHRDs). While we laud this development as necessary, we see it as being incomplete and ultimately incapable of fully handling the women's rights catch-22.

Much of the problem stems from the fact that the international conception of the rights of HRDs relies on their identity as HRDs, an identity that is defined by one thing above all: action. This fact, however, hamstrings any implementation of HRD protections because it demands that the rights holders be active participants in the defence of human rights. This ignores the cultural and structural environments that constrain not only women's actions but even their self-conceptions and sense of possible actions.

In this context, also with the aim of increasing the success and impact of women's struggles, the question we wish to answer is this: how can human rights law support and protect women as potential HRDs? Given that bringing a focused consideration of women to HRD rights is unequipped to fully account for women, we suggest the opposite approach of bringing a HRD perspective into women's rights.

After investigating the development of the conception of HRDs at an international level, we look to understand the nature of women's oppression in general. Using Silvia Federici's Marxist-feminist theories,¹ we identify the divide of the public and private spheres as not only fundamental to this oppression but also to the law's inability to react to it. With this insight in hand, we then look to labour rights for an alternative construction of human rights, their protection, and the rights holders' relationship to this. Taking inspiration from labour rights, we offer a suggestion for a new formulation of women's rights, which we believe, can better protect and support women as potential HRDs as well as mitigate concerns voiced by Silvia Federici and Wendy Brown² about the patronising nature of international human rights law.

II. Human Rights Defenders in International Law

1. The development of protections for Human Rights Defenders

In this paper we refer to the international conception of HRDs as though it is monolithic, but this was by no means always the case; even now "HRD" is not universally defined. In 1998, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms after nearly fourteen years of negotiations.³ The Declaration states that "[e]veryone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels".⁴ Notably, what it does not state, either in the title or the text, is that the rights holders towards which the Declaration is directed should be called "human rights defenders," and therefore no definition for the rights holders beyond "everyone." This is no coincidence.

In 1984, the United Nations (UN) established a working group of member states and non-governmental organisations to develop the text which would eventually become the Declara-

tion adopted in 1998. Deliberations were contentious. The debate centered on questions such as what role civil society should play in human rights at national and international levels and whether individual resistance against states should be protected. Caught up in these debates was the phrase “human rights defender,” which supporters felt emphasised the individuals they were hoping to protect. However, dissent over potential sacrifices of state sovereignty led to the omission of the phrase from the final text presented to the General Assembly. While the Declaration would go on to be adopted four years later, commentators have called it “a compromise in which no parties were fully satisfied.”⁵

In spite of its troubled development and apparently unsatisfactory execution, the Declaration spurred further developments at the UN to better protect, and articulate, these new rights holders. One such instrument was the Special Representative, introduced in 2000 and replaced by a Special Rapporteur in 2008. The Representative was entrusted with making country visits and delivering reports and suggestions on HRDs. The position was created by the Human Rights Commission at the behest of Norway, one of the original supporters of the “human rights defender” language. In this and subsequent developments made by the Human Rights Commission and its replacement Council, use of the phrase “human rights defender” has been consistent, from the title, “Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders,” to fact sheets outlining the work done by the UN in support of HRDs. It is in one such fact sheet from 2004 that we can find a simple definition for HRD: a person who, “individually or with others, act[s] to promote or protect human rights.”⁶

Less clear is the definition of “woman human rights defender”. WHRDs have drawn attention from the Special Representative and Rapporteurs on HRDs over the years, but gained the complete notice of the UN in 2013 with UN General Assembly’s first-ever resolution on WHRDs.⁷ The resolution calls on states to, *inter alia*, protect WHRDs, respect and support their activities, condemn and prevent human rights violations and abuses as well as violence and discrimination against them.⁸ The resolution does not, however, give a definition for WHRD other than acknowledging the importance of “women [...] who engage in the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and all people who engage in the defence of the rights of women and gender equality.”⁹ This broad interpretation mirrors that of Special Rapporteurs over time. Nevertheless, either explicitly or implicitly, with focus on issues such as gender violence, they have made clear that their interest is primarily women who are HRDs.¹⁰

It is clear from the work of the Special Rapporteurs on HRDs in the past decade that WHRDs have become a point of emphasis at the UN. In that time, the Rapporteurs presented two focused overviews of the global situation of WHRDs, addressed WHRDs in detail within their annual reports, and brought a gendered perspective to bear on all of their work, whether regional or topical.¹¹ In these reports they paint a picture of the many struggles which WHRDs face at the intersection of two identities, as women and as HRDs. Their reports largely address the gendered nature of the threats and violence which WHRDs encounter due to their work and beliefs. However, they also acknowledge that, aside from these immediate and more visible dangers, WHRDs, by the simple fact of their gender, are seen as “challenging accepted sociocultural norms, traditions, perceptions and stereotypes about femininity, sexual orientation, and the role and status of women in society.”¹² Forst’s report from 2019 particularly recognises cultural and structural phenomena, such as marginalisation, stigmatisation, and threats within the private sphere, that pressure women to *not* act in defence of human rights.¹³

2. Intersectional view of WHRDs and inadequacies of action-based protections

This drive to better incorporate the needs of WHRDs into the analyses and policy suggestions of HRD bodies in the UN and other international human rights mechanisms is a crucial

one. However, these mechanisms are ultimately hindered by their intrinsic construction of the HRD identity as actively defending human rights. It is clear from reports like Forst's that those working on this issue are aware of the cultural and structural barriers about which we are concerned. But the inability of the UN HRD regime to address these issues or even approach them meaningfully is made obvious by the framing of the report, where many such issues are not labeled as violations in themselves but rather put under the heading; "Contexts and root causes of violations."¹⁴ Though Forst is perfectly cognisant of the systems at play – "[p]atriarchal ideas circumscribe how and when women exercise voice and agency in the private and public spheres" – he is incapable of discussing such issues in concrete terms without resorting to the perspective visible to the law: "[h]uman rights defenders whose actions are perceived as challenging patriarchal [...] systems tend to face threats and attacks."¹⁵

We acknowledge that the situation for those women who "face threats and attacks" in retaliation for their work is highly concerning and deserves the attention of international human rights institutions. Nevertheless, we are equally concerned for those women who are unable to begin work in defense of human rights and thus unable to even qualify for the protections offered by the current UN WHRD system. We hope here to develop and recommend a legal solution to this issue. We believe that the problem the UN HRD system faces is not one that can be solved with further awareness-raising, more fine-grained policy suggestions, or more intersectional analysis of the situation of WHRDs – at least within the bubble of international HRD instruments. This is because the problem is rooted in the conception of HRDs as active defenders, which makes these instruments incapable of seeing, let alone addressing, the people who are unable to take action at all. Unable to rely on the idea of HRDs as they are constructed within international apparatuses, we have chosen to turn away from them in search of another solution.

III. Formulating legal support for women's activism

1. Marxist-feminist analysis of the position of women

The patriarchal society in which virtually all women live is extraordinarily prejudicial towards women being and becoming activists for human rights as HRDs. We find an enlightening perspective on the power structures of the patriarchy and its involvement in women's lives in the Marxist-feminist analysis of Silvia Federici. She argues that "[c]apitalist accumulation is structurally dependent on the free appropriation of immense areas of labour and resources that must appear as externalities to the market" of productive labour (she also refers to this as 'primitive accumulation').¹⁶ In Federici's major analysis of primitive accumulation, capitalist accumulation is predicated on the unwaged reproductive labour of which women have been the main subjects, and "has given this socially imposed condition an appearance of naturality ('femininity')."¹⁷

Reproductive labour encompasses necessary activities and relations that are often associated with caregiving as well as domestic roles like cleaning, cooking, childcare and elder care. Federici argues that reproductive labour produces the capitalist market of productive labour most fundamental element: labour power. Much more than housekeeping, reproductive labour serves the workers, and the children as future workers, physically, emotionally, sexually, and is the basis to maintain the productive workforce day after day.¹⁸ Productive labour, she emphasizes, results in goods or services in the public sphere that have monetary value in the capitalist system and are thus compensated in the form of wage. However, reproductive labour, as an inexpensive method of supporting the workforce in the name of maintaining the capital division, is associated with the private sphere that does not result in receiving a wage.¹⁹

Federici's specific conclusions and goals are well beyond the scope of this paper and, indeed, we believe they are best handled on the ground by the stakeholders themselves rather than in a top-down legal fashion. However, for our purposes, Federici's analysis still holds great value with its conception of the reproductive versus productive spheres (and the way that this overlaps with the private versus public sphere conception), as well as the understanding of women as a sort of subsidiary working class within the capitalist (and thus patriarchal) regime. For Federici, the oppression of women is primarily rooted in this division of capitalist society. She reveals the steady devaluation and fragmentation of women's lives and safety. This approach, we would like to argue, also illuminates the forces behind the challenges and risks women face as WHRD.

2. Finding Federici in the world – domestic labour organisation

Armed with Federici's ideas, it was easy to identify cases where these issues are already being grappled with on the ground – namely, in domestic labour organisation. Federici sees paid domestic labour as only a symptom of the larger issues of capitalism and its disregard for reproductive work in the new international division of labour under neoliberal globalisation.²⁰ For our purposes, we view it on its own terms as representative of women's struggles globally which extend well beyond the realm of labour. Domestic workers, who are more often than not women, are by definition relegated to the private sphere of the home and thus generally isolated from other such workers.²¹ Additionally, the nature and location of their work makes them basically invisible to the law because "domestic labour" has historically been excluded from labour laws and the private sphere is traditionally seen as beyond the scope of the law.²² These factors also contribute to and enable the myriad forms of discrimination and violations they face from employers.²³ While the exact contexts and circumstances may be different between women working in another person's home and those in their own, they are facing most of the same challenges. For domestic workers, in spite of these challenges, we can find many instances of organisation, resistance, and defence of their rights.

3. Domestic labour organisation in practice

Although the breadth of literature on recent successes in domestic labour organisation displays just how diverse the experiences and approaches of domestic workers around the world are, and clearly shows that these workers and their organisations are not monolithic, we can identify from it a number of aspects which might be equally useful in the organisation and activism of women more generally.²⁴ First, due to the fragmented and isolated work environments of most domestic workers, they depend on non-work-related contacts, networks, and organisations to develop those collectivities which would eventually become devoted to domestic workers' issues. These include neighbourhood and community organisations, mutual aid associations, churches, and social networks built around shared ethnicities and countries-of-origin.²⁵ Such associations and connections are resources which many women possess even if they are not themselves domestic workers. It is for this reason we see the potential for women of all backgrounds to follow a similar path to organisation and activism on behalf of any rights, labour-related or not.

Second, social justice tends to be a critical element of domestic labour organisations' agendas and strategies. Researchers identified two reasons for this. One, such politics grew out of the environments in which these organisations developed. With shared ethnicities, countries of origin, languages, and communities as well as shared concerns, the women who formed these organisations did so in a context devoted not only to labour but the myriad interests relevant to their lives.²⁶ Two, in an industry which suffers not only from fragmentation but even from a lack of identity as "real work", domestic labour organisations often struggle to find ways to interest and involve domestic workers themselves.²⁷ A common practice for the organisations is to connect to the breadth of issues relevant to domestic workers' lives out-

side labour.²⁸ Women discuss and work on issues of social justice, which are generally issues of human rights, within the context of the networks and associations in their lives, even if they would not identify themselves as activists or their associations as advocacy groups or non-governmental organisations. We view this as evidence of women's interest in human rights work in forms that are not traditionally defined as such. Better still, it is evidence of the success of organisations created by and for women and their interests.

Third, in addition to the outward-facing role of fighting for rights and recognition, many domestic labour organisations play an inward-facing role of creating a sense of community and solidarity among workers. Because domestic work is so fragmented and devalued, domestic workers often lack a sense of identity as workers and rights holders. By gathering domestic workers together in an open collective environment they are able to reconceive of their own identities and gain a sense of subjectivity within the struggle for recognition, respect, and a better life.²⁹ Although the specific case of domestic worker identity may not be relevant to all women, we see this part of domestic labour organisations as holding great potential for women's organisations helping women gain a sense of subjectivity in the struggle for women's rights and opening up their sense of possibilities of who they can be and what they can do.

IV. Labour and unionisation as an empowering perspective

While all of these examples are indicative of the possibilities of women's organisation, they also reveal the problems with the traditional understanding of activism on behalf of human rights and people's, especially women's, role in that activism. As human rights law is constructed now, it defines rights as naturally possessed by humans and then expects that these rights are incorporated and enforced by governments' own legal systems. Necessary as this may be for any semblance of justice to prevail on earth, we feel that it is inadequate to place so much trust in the law to effectively perceive, adjudicate, and enforce rights for all people everywhere. For this reason, we turn once again to labour organisation for inspiration, not in its direct implementation but in its foundational legal conception.

1. The unique framing of collective action in labour rights

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) was founded in 1919 in the aftermath of the First World War as part of the Treaty of Versailles. From the start, the ILO was built with an understanding that workers themselves needed to defend their rights and have the right to associate and organise in order to do so most effectively. Though the only statement of principles and purpose made at the time was a brief preamble to the ILO Constitution, it recognised workers' right to freedom of association as one of the central tenets of labour rights. More telling than this was the ILO's tripartite structure which placed workers as equal partners and participants with states and employers. The ILO's most obvious emphasis on workers' organisation came in 1944 with the Declaration of Philadelphia, its first comprehensive statement of "aims and purposes."

In its first article, the Declaration points out four of the ILO's "fundamental principles [...] in particular," which include, that "freedom of expression and association are essential to sustained progress", and that;

"the war against want requires to be carried on with unrelenting vigour within each nation, and by continuous and concerted international effort in which the representatives of workers and employers, enjoying equal status with those of governments, join with them in free discussion and democratic decision with a view to the promotion of the common welfare."³⁰

These points perfectly encapsulate the perspective of labour rights on collective action—not simply as a right for workers but as a fundamental part of the process of achieving progress for workers’ rights and maintaining the achievements. Though the second point refers to “representatives of workers” rather than workers themselves, the first two “Fundamental Conventions” passed by the ILO after the Declaration were the “Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention” (1948) and the “Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention” (1949), in which workers “furthering and defending” their own rights is firmly established as one of the most important aspects of labour rights.³¹

It may seem overblown to emphasise workers’ right to association, organisation, and collective action since these are rights fundamental to all humans as established by the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.³² However, our purpose in focusing on this is not to point out the fact of it being a right, but rather the framing of it, which is notable for a few reasons. It ties it explicitly to an identity—worker—and, by extension, ties it to the class relations in which workers are situated. This lends the right to association a political dimension which it does not so explicitly have in its general form. The conception of this right and its purpose is clear—it is to provide workers with the necessary tools to leverage their primary advantage—greater numbers—over the capitalist class in the struggle to further and defend their rights. This is a powerful idea not only as a right but as an identity-shaping notion, tying the identity of worker directly to the defence of one’s rights as a worker. Furthermore, these rights (and, indeed, the entire notion of “rights”) are legal and exist within legal systems and yet, the inclusion of the right to association, organisation, and collective action on behalf of those rights is an acknowledgement by and within the law that the law itself is incapable of completely vouchsafing those rights. As a result of this deficit, the law must include protections for and emphasis on the need for extra-legal systems of resistance and defence—namely, collective action by the rights holders themselves.

2. Adapting labour rights’ collective action for women

We see this logic as being equally relevant to women’s rights. In Federici’s analysis, women’s oppression is part and parcel of capitalism, and so it is obvious that what is taken for granted as necessary for the support and protection of workers against the powers behind capitalism—collective action—is just as necessary for women.³³ Even setting Federici’s perspective aside, it is easy to see that the same reasons hold true for women, in that they are disadvantaged in the face of powers, concrete and abstract, but retain one potentially enormous resource in the fight—sheer numbers. For a group making up half of the world’s population, association, organisation, and collective action are obviously the most potent tools available to combat forces possessing superior access to capital and nearly all forms of political and cultural power.

In light of this, it is only natural to parallel labour rights in women’s rights. A right to association, organisation, and collective action among and by women needs to be enshrined within the international instruments and bodies devoted to furthering and protecting women’s rights. This needs to be done not only with the intention of giving visibility and protection to those women obstructed from partaking in these rights, but as a campaign devoted to augmenting the identity of women with a sense of stewardship over their rights and all human rights as well as a sense of empowerment from the relationships they have and could develop with other women.

V. Reasons for “collective action” route to supporting WHRDs

1. Answer to intersectional issues of HRD protection

One of our main prompts to seeking this approach was our belief that, crucial as legal protections for HRDs are, they are incapable of identifying and addressing obstacles to women becoming HRDs. We feel that directly associating the right to collective action with women will provide these protections more effectively. Much of the literature about domestic labour organisation specifically counters the notion that such workers are “unorganisable.”³⁴ The very fact that researchers note and address this so consistently reveals the power that comes from treating labour organisation not only as necessary but as the default. A situation in which workers are visibly unorganised and impeded from doing so is seen as aberrant and fundamentally in need of correction. We hope to attach such a conception of organisation and collective action to women themselves, thus providing more visibility as well as a sense of urgency to situations where women’s organisational capacities are hindered.

2. Emphasis on pre-existing organisation

The literature shows that in recent decades there has been a surge of organisation among domestic workers which has produced notable (if incomplete) successes in gaining legal recognition and protection and better working conditions.³⁵ Likewise, many authors identify the breadth of women’s involvement in formal and informal associations and networks relating to many aspects of their lives beyond work from neighbourhood associations, to church groups, to migrant groups, to mutual aid associations.³⁶ In all such cases, the work and involvement of women should be celebrated, encouraged, and protected. We feel that there is no better way to do this than to emphasise that these women are embracing and utilising their right to association and collective action and that there is support and protection for them in exercising it.

3. Minimal paternalistic remains

Federici herself regards international institutions like the UN as culpable for the propagation and maintenance of the global neoliberal regime and so utterly distrusts anything within the UN human rights apparatus.³⁷ While we don’t share her complete lack of faith, given that we are attempting to address women’s liberation through law we are inexorably confronted with Wendy Brown’s paradox of rights.³⁸ On behalf of women, Brown writes, “rights secure our standing as individuals even as they obscure the treacherous ways in which that standing is achieved and regulated; they must be specific and concrete in order to reveal and redress women’s subordination, yet potentially entrench our subordination through that specificity.”³⁹ Our hope is that though our suggestion specifies and reifies the identity of women it does so in a circumscribed way, primarily serving to transfer some amount of control of women’s struggles from the law to women themselves without abandoning them to the dangers of invisibility in a patriarchal world. In particular we hope this will encourage women to articulate their own conceptions of rights, modes of organisation and action, and, ultimately, solutions to the problems they face as women and as human beings. Nevertheless, while we are optimistic, we are also wary of the potential for any law and particularly those at such a high level as the UN to be manipulated, intentionally or unintentionally, into serving extant power structures. For this reason any actual implementation of our suggestion would demand further consideration regarding such things as the exact language of women’s rights to collective action and the manner in which this was to be communicated to rights holders.

VI. Concerns to account for

There are a number of other concerns that we feel must be taken into consideration in the case of implementing our suggestion. First, we recognise that in spite of our intersectional approach to WHRDs and their illegibility to the law, our suggestion is in its own way perpetuating the problematic one-identity-at-a-time rights paradigm. We feel that this concern is largely alleviated by the fact that we are not suggesting to add a new right for women, but simply associating a pre-existing human right especially with women. However, the potentially identity-shaping consequences of our suggestion are troublesome from an intersectional standpoint. Based on what researchers observed in the field of women's organisations it is clear that women are already managing to negotiate numerous identities in the associations and connections in which they participate. This gives us hope that our suggestion will not lead to a monolithic or overriding conception of women in the development of women's organisational identities. We also recognise the potential applicability of our suggestion logic to the rights of other marginalised identity groups such as LGBTQI people and indigenous groups, implementation of which could further mitigate any intersectional concerns.

Second, we also do not want our suggestion to place the entire responsibility of women's struggles on women alone. We believe that the call for protection of WHRDs has to be more than a shibboleth, and must rather integrate into social justice consensus. Therefore, the protection of women-as-WHRDs is also dependent on the responsibility and the solidarity of publics with other identities. In this case we find an excellent example in the UN definition for WHRDs which includes not only women but anyone who defends women's rights.⁴⁰ In this sense, we feel it is critical to call others to protect and become WHRDs.

Finally, we recognise that women are naturally politicised by virtue of their subordinate position in society. By associating the need for collective action directly with women's identities as women, our suggestion frames their lives and realities in this specific political context. In following the feminist call for the politicisation of the private, we definitely see the necessity of public and collective struggle. However, important as it is for women to be involved in such a struggle for women's liberation, we do not want to impose a model activism. Political action has many faces, and it can lie, hence, in non-conformist behavior, in the denial of asymmetric power relations, and can be expressed in openly rebellious as well as quietly denying forms of action. Therefore, we suggest instead to broaden the notion of resistance (and as a result of recognising WHRDs and defending them). This extension of definition not only can give voice to the unheard and the micro-struggles of everyday life that inherently always reflect the overall macro-struggle - but it can, above all, rethink and question patriarchal perspectives on struggle and introduces a gender sensitive approach to the problem of women's oppression and liberation.

VII. Conclusion

The question we began with is: how can supports and protections for women as potential-but-as-yet-unrealised HRDs be implemented? While we laud the UN for its attention to the specific problems of WHRDs, we see the foundations of this approach as incapable of fully addressing the needs of women defending or wishing to defend their rights. To answer our question we instead look to the long-standing position of organisation within labour rights. We believe that the strongest solution at the level of international law is to build the right of association and collective action into the rights of women. Though it is true that these are already fundamental human rights for all people, we feel that making them an intrinsic part of the rights of women achieves many of the things we hope to see in the struggle for women's rights.

In worker's rights it is taken for granted that collective action, and by extension, the self-defence of one's rights as a worker are necessary protections. The same should be true for women's rights. Women should have their rights to association and collective action made more visible to the law. This is particularly vital for giving the law access to the long-invisible domestic sphere, the site of much of women's oppression as well as their potential capacity for action. Just as importantly, women should feel empowered to act on behalf of their and all women's rights as a natural and fundamental part of their lives as women, not simply because the law will protect them if they choose to defend their rights.

Finally, we want better protections and supports for women to defend human rights while firmly placing the control and responsibility over that struggle in the hands of women—not the state. We see control by women as crucial for promoting WHRDs without contaminating their ideas and actions, or the environment in which they are working. We are wary of the paternalistic and all-too-often Western neoliberal policies of a one-size-fits-all international human rights system. It is our hope that this suggestion can serve to minimise the negative effects of international human rights law while creating a more supportive, enabling, and safe environment for women to improve the world.

¹ Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*, Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012.

² Wendy Brown, *Suffering Rights as Paradoxes*, Constellations, 2000, Vol. 7, No. 2.

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