The Institutional Politics of WPS: Three Lessons on Resistance from Feminist Pedagogy

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Introduction

Since the adoption of Resolution 1325 by the United Nations Security Council in the year 2000, the international Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda has become a broadly accepted normative framework that establishes how gender considerations should be taken into account in the international governance of peace and security (see Introduction this volume). The WPS agenda was famously developed by and has been honed through the efforts of civil society activists, working in collaboration with UN staff and supportive member-states (Anderlini, 2019; Otto, 2009; Tryggestad, 2009). While its civil society roots are unique, the agenda is also remarkable because it has been institutionalized in formal state bodies and international organizations at an impressive scale. More than half of all UN member-states have adopted National Action Plans on Resolution 1325 and related resolutions. Organizations ranging from the UN to the European Union, and from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to the African Union, have adopted policies to implement the agenda. Following from these policy developments, states and international institutions have established both structures—such as gender advisors' offices—and practices—such as gender training—to put the agenda to work in practice, to *institutionalize* the normative commitments of WPS.

What makes this feat of institutionalization particularly remarkable is that it has taken place in traditionally masculine institutions concerned with security, and in the context of global mobilizations against 'gender ideology'. Across the world, from Brazil to Germany, South Africa to Turkey, Pakistan to China and in various fora of the UN, activists and state representatives have launched attacks on the term 'gender', against what is often called 'gender ideology', and on individuals and

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institutions seen to be their embodied representatives. Such attacks were first formulated in these terms around the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women, but they have intensified in their reach and scale since the mid-2010s (Antić & Radačić, 2020; Corrêa, 2020; Graff & Korolczuk, 2022; Holvikivi et al., 2024; Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017). In comparison to high-level wrangling over the introduction of the term 'gender' in the Beijing Declaration in 1995, or the sudden and dramatic withdrawal of Turkey from the Istanbul Convention on Violence Against Women in 2021, the WPS agenda's provisions calling for gender equality, gender advisors and gender training have been comparatively uncontroversial. Further, measures aimed at institutionalizing the agenda's commitments around the participation and protection of women and the prevention of violence against them have been put in place in institutions that are often described as institutions of hegemonic masculinity, such as the military, which are especially hostile to feminist politics (Kronsell, 2012; Wright, 2016). This political backdrop thus begs questions: How is it that the institutionalization of WPS has been so successful? Will this institutionalization hold in the face of attacks?

Work on WPS suggests a couple of reasons why the agenda may have (so far) largely avoided the maelstrom of anti-gender mobilizations, both of which amount to strategies for operating below the radar. On the one hand, the literature on gender experts and gender expertise, including in the field of women/gender, peace and security, is replete with accounts of gender experts who covertly institutionalize progressive political projects. Describing themselves as the 'Trojan horses' of feminist politics, they evade controversy by smuggling radical concepts into unsuspecting institutions and enacting 'small subversions' (Holvikivi, 2023; Kunz, 2016). On the other hand, literature on the politics of WPS has also charted the many concessions made by those advocating for the agenda in order for it to be accepted by conservative political actors. These include focusing on a relatively uncontroversial 'protection' agenda, at the expense of implementing more radical changes to ensure women's meaningful participation or addressing militarization in order to bring about peace (Cohn et al., 2010; O'Sullivan & Krulišová, 2020). In effect, this has often amounted to emptying the agenda of its more radical political potential, instead rendering gender a 'safe' concept amenable to upholding the status quo. We might add to this an insight from the literature on anti-gender mobilizations: that attacks on gender-progressive policies—counter-practices, in the terminology of this volume—tend to be organized around political flashpoints, such as the introduction of legislation on marriage equality, as was the case for the French *Manif pour tous*, or around elections, as in Brazil (Corrêa & Parker, 2020, p. 12; Fassin, 2024, p. 23). Security Council politics are often criticized for their undemocratic nature. It is possible that the fact that the Council's deliberations have been removed from popular political debates has meant that anti-gender fervour has not reliably reached the ways in which the Council conducts its business.

Against this backdrop, two things are worth noting. First, ceding the ground to conservative forces who seek to empty the concept of gender of its radical political potential is an unsatisfactory implementation of the WPS agenda. An agenda that

is accepted because it operationalizes a 'safe' understanding of gender and thus does not disturb the 'investment, made by these [anti-gender] crusades in the preservation or restoration of deeply racialized and unequal gender and sexuality orders' (Corrêa & Parker, 2020, p. 14) is clearly at odds with the feminist commitments of this agenda. Second, regardless of what version of gender—radical or conservative—is put into practice through the institutionalization of the WPS agenda, there is every reason to believe that it, too, will be increasingly targeted by anti-gender attacks. Here, one need not think further than to the institutional home of the WPS agenda, the UN Security Council, and the fact that several current leaders of its permanent members, are prominent proponents of anti-gender ideology (see e.g. Bias, 2024). Recent events in global politics—including Russia's war on Ukraine and Israel's war on Gaza—have placed Security Council politics at the centre of media reporting and public scrutiny. This public attention may also draw the attention of anti-gender movements to the Security Council.

There is thus a credible threat to the institutionalization of norms of gender equality in the field of peace and security. What is to be done? And how should those working on WPS in institutional settings approach this threat? This has been an abiding concern of those doing feminist work in governance and educational institutions, who often use the term 'resistance' to describe the counter-discourses and counter-practices they come up against in their work in institutionalizing WPS (Lombardo & Mergaert, 2013; Puechguirbal, 2017; Wright, 2016). In this chapter, I look to three different literatures to consider how feminist scholars and practitioners might orient themselves towards increasing resistance to the project of institutionalizing WPS. First, I draw on the literature examining the institutionalization of WPS, gender and gender expertise in institutions of state governance, including international organizations. This body of work provides the empirical material that grounds my examination of WPS politics. Second, in order to contextualize the analysis of resistance this literature provides, I examine the growing body of literature on anti-gender movements. This body of work complements the accounts of resistance to institutional gender work by casting a broader gaze, offering further clues into how counter-discourses and counter-practices are organized. Third, to deepen the analytical insights of this literature, I look to feminist pedagogical literature on dealing with resistance to feminism in the classroom for lessons on how to think about the normative contestation that the introduction of WPS in institutions of state power sets up. Reading our contemporary moment with the help of these insights, I propose that we think of the politics of institutional contestation through the conceptual frame of resistances—as diverse forms of contradictory investments with distinct political implications. Overall, this chapter argues that thinking of resistances as distinct forms of counter-practices and/or counter-discourses moves our thinking and strategizing beyond the unhelpful binary stalemate in which actors are understood as being either 'pro' or 'anti-' gender-progressive norms.

Conceptualizing Resistance

In making sense of the WPS agenda as both a project and a target of normative contestation, it is important to examine what we have learned from anti-gender mobilizations across the world. Literature on these attacks provides instructive clues as to what the common points of contestation are: rights to gender identity and equal treatment regardless of sexual orientation; legal protections from gender-based violence; knowledge production around gender; sexual and reproductive health and rights; and comprehensive sex education (Butler, 2024, p. 9). Observers in this field also draw attention to the broader social and political contexts against which these attacks take place: intensifying neoliberalism, the resurgent political influence of religious actors and a tide of anti-democratic politics (Corrêa & Parker, 2020, p. 15). This growing body of literature has largely focused on key political flashpoints—new legislation such as the Istanbul Convention, electoral campaigns and, in the case of Colombia, a referendum on the peace accords—and the involvement of civil society campaigns and movements (Corrêa & Parker, 2020, p. 12; Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017, p. 4). In addition to the studies that focus on national politics, there is also some feminist scholarship that examines debates around UN treaties and language (Antić & Radačić, 2020; Cupać & Ebetürk, 2020; Goetz, 2020). This work, however, is focused on the adoption of policies or legislation and the stances of member-states, rather than the institutionalization of gender norms through the development of institutional structures and practices. This body of scholarship has, in other words, yet to grapple with how anti-gender normative contestations play out within the institutional spaces of governments and intergovernmental organizations.

The question of how struggles over gender norms play out in institutional settings remains a key concern for WPS, as these are important spaces for the implementation of the agenda's normative commitments. A handful of scholars and practitioners in the field of WPS have shared their insights on the intra-institutional dynamics of conducting gender work in these spaces (Cook & Allen, 2020; Goetz & Jenkins, 2018; Puechguirbal, 2017). Their analyses can be read as contributing to some common insights in the broader literature on gender experts and gender expertise, especially in international institutions (Chappell & Mackay, 2021; Ferguson, 2014; Kunz et al., 2019). Related to the question of normative contestation around gender mainstreaming and implementation of the WPS agenda, these analyses often grapple with the question of both institutional and interpersonal resistance to gender work. Their accounts of resistance cast a helpful light on what the political struggles in this field are, how institutions effect or resist attempts at change, and what the possibilities and limits for institutional reform are. However, when considered in tandem with the work on anti-gender movements, it becomes evident that accounts of resistance in institutional gender work tend to assume that what they are up against—the patriarchy of the institutions concerned—is something of a constant: an unchanging and known backdrop. In other words, they operate on the assumption that the resistance that gender experts face in their institutional work amounts to a

defence of the status quo. In contrast, work on anti-gender movements reveals that 'although interpreted as a backlash against progressive movements, anti-gender ideology is driven by a stronger wish, namely, the restoration of a patriarchal dream-order' (Butler, 2024, p. 14). Importantly, this dream-order was never the reality (contra the status quo understanding of patriarchal resistance), but rather it is a substantive normative project in itself. Resistance to WPS work, in the context of such anti-gender mobilizations, cannot be assumed to simply be against how WPS proposes to change the status quo. It must be understood as a project in its own right, aiming to bring about a particular social order. Its workings require substantive analysis, as they do not reliably or logically flow from the changes that WPS work seeks to effect.

Following from this, if we are to make sense of the normative contestation around WPS by focusing on resistance to the institutionalization of the agenda, we need a conceptualization of 'resistance' that is capable of meaningfully engaging with the insights provided by scholarship on anti-gender mobilizations and by research on the conduct of gender expertise in institutional spaces. Here, I propose to enlist the help of a third body of literature: feminist pedagogy. Thought in this field has long been preoccupied with how feminist and gender knowledge is resisted, negotiated and translated, with how pedagogical encounters (re)produce particular normative orders. Like this chapter, this body of thought is concerned with the contestation of gender knowledge within structured institutional spaces and relationships. Although the focus of feminist pedagogical theorizing is on classrooms and (higher) education, it provides some useful parallels to think with.

Instructively for our purposes, Elizabeth Flynn (2001) proposes that when talking about 'resistance', we differentiate between three different types of resistance: (1) strategic resistance, (2) counter-strategic resistance and (3) reactive resistance. In this typology, the first type, strategic resistance, refers to revolutionary resistance movements: feminism, anticolonialism, antiracism, queer liberation, etc. This involves resisting established structures of power and oppression in a bid to make the world more just, or at least more liveable for marginalized subjects. This is akin to the feminist politics that inform the WPS agenda and the progressive gender order it promotes (see Introduction this volume). Flynn's second type, counter-strategic resistance, involves a counter-movement to such revolutionary projects. The type of highly organized anti-gender movements coordinated by, for example, the Christian right and disseminated through established networks constitute counter-strategic resistance. Counter-strategic resistance thus encompasses what the editors of this volume conceptualize as counter-discourses and counter-practices. Beyond this binary oppositional setup, however, Flynn reminds us that there is a third type of resistance: that of reactive resistance. This involves contesting the logics or goals of strategic resistance, but it does not constitute a well-planned or coordinated attack as in the case of counter-strategic resistance. Rather, it focuses on the individual and emotional level of resistance as a distinct type. This resistance might involve the articulation of counter-discourses—such as statements that align with the rhetoric of anti-gender attacks—without the enactment of deliberate counter-practices—such as pursuing legislative or policy reforms to maintain a conservative

gender order (see Introduction this volume). The recognition that there is an affective and not always consciously thought-out element to counter-discourses is an important empirical point. The anti-gender literature reminds us that these are projects driven by affective investments—such as love for the heteronormative family or fear (however unfounded that fear may be) of the nonconforming sexual subject—as much as or more than by logical reasoning (Ahmed, 2004; Butler, 2024; Hemmings, 2020). Returning to the question of normative contestations around WPS in institutional politics, I propose that we can learn three lessons from thinking with Flynn's typology.

Three Lessons from Feminist Pedagogy

Lesson 1. Strategic Resistance: Don't Cede the Ground

'Resistance', in Flynn's (2001) first sense of the term, refers to strategic efforts by the marginalized and the oppressed to improve their lot, and by those in coalition with them to strive for a more just and liveable world. Using this term to think about the WPS agenda serves to remind us of the radical, transformative vision its architects vested in it (Kirby & Shepherd, 2024; Otto, 2009). The agenda traces its lineage from women's peace activism aimed at dismantling patriarchal militarism and abolishing war (Confortini, 2012). According to the civil society activists involved in writing the first drafts of Resolution 1325, the agenda was crafted not to tinker around the policies and procedures of institutions of power, but rather to transform the international system (Anderlini, 2019).

No serious feminist observer thinks that the WPS agenda has successfully achieved the goals of women's peace activism. On the one hand, the meaningful implementation of its commitments has been slow and piecemeal. But, more fundamentally, critics have pointed to the disquieting ways in which the agenda reinforces global racialized hierarchies and has been mobilized to support imperial politics such as the US-led war on terror (Haastrup & Hagen, 2020; Henry, 2024; Pratt, 2013). Feminist scholars and activists have charted the mechanisms by which more radical feminist hopes have been bargained away, not only in the adoption of the WPS resolutions by the UN Security Council, but also in the national implementation of the agenda. For example, Míla O'Sullivan and Kateřina Krulišová trace how the WPS agenda has been interpreted in the Czech National Action Plan, noting that the lack of civil society involvement and the context of anti-gender ideology mobilizations have led to a policy that is 'grounded in essentialism; [that] reproduces both the instrumentalization of women and stereotypical assumptions about women's roles in the context of peace and security' (O'Sullivan & Krulišová, 2020, p. 528). In sum, at both national and international levels, the WPS agenda has fallen short of initiating meaningful transformation of a gendered, racialized and

militarized global order. This toothlessness is one potential reason why the agenda has not yet been the target of sustained anti-gender attacks.

While the agenda, especially in its institutionalized form, is riddled with limitations as well as downright failings, it nonetheless is or could be a tool in a struggle for radical change. There are numerous accounts of grassroots women's groups using the WPS resolutions to forward their own ends. For example, Laura McLeod (2012) shows how feminist activists involved in the Women in Black movement in Serbia adapted the language of security in the early 2000s in order to be able to formulate claims drawing on the increasingly influential WPS agenda, while at the same time re-signifying the text of the resolutions to fit their own, pre-existing values and ambitions (see also Lopidia & Hall, 2020; Reiling, 2017). The point here is not that Resolution 1325 and the following WPS resolutions are the be-all and end-all of feminist political goals in the realm of peace and security. Its advocates are clear on that. Current Secretary General of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Madeleine Rees notes as much when she argues: 'the WPS agenda was there to try and bring women into an existing structure which is very definitely about patriarchy … a temporary measure to get women into all processes concerned with war, security and peace' (in Onyesoh et al., 2020, p. 233). Similarly, women's rights advocate Hina Jillani argues: 'Let us build on 1325. Whatever you have on hand you use to your advantage. But it cannot be the center of our focus' (cited in Manchanda, 2020, p. 73). In other words, the WPS agenda should be understood, not as a normative end goal in and of itself, but rather as an imperfect tool in working towards a feminist future.

The lesson, then, is this: We must not allow the constraints of the WPS agenda, or the fear of backlash, to distract us from thinking about the feminist ambitions behind this institutional framework. Countless activists have argued that the WPS resolutions are a useful tool for their organizing. This is surely a meaningful contribution of the agenda. But it does not mean that the agenda itself should be the a priori focus of activism and organizing. If it is made politically palatable to anti-gender activists and amenable to the conduct of imperial wars, we should take a step back and reflect on the broader horizons of our political imaginaries. Especially in challenging times, we need to continue to create alternative political and social visions and commit to strategic resistance. Confortini (2012, p. 121) notes of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, one of the WPS agenda's key civil society proponents, that throughout its history the organization has consistently pursued both strategies of mainstreaming its politics through the UN and disengagement politics of protest and refusal. In order to keep the political potential of the agenda alive, it is important to continue to cultivate its vision of strategic resistance, rather than to negotiate all of its goals away to secure a fully mainstreamed programme of action. A WPS agenda that has ceded all its feminist ambitions is no longer a useful tool for that project.

Lesson 2. Counter-Strategic Resistance: Recognize the Organized Nature of the Threat

Flynn's (2001) typology, produced over 20 years ago, refers here to anti-feminist, homophobic and racist movements contesting the politics of strategic resistance. In order to understand the latest incarnations of these movements, it is helpful to refer to the literature and activism charting the intensification, particularly since the mid-2010s, of global anti-gender attacks (Corrêa et al., 2018; Graff et al., 2019; Hemmings, 2020). This literature alerts us to the serious and organized nature of this type of resistance, with important implications for how to deal with it.

First, what is noteworthy is that such counter-strategic resistance is involved in active world-building projects and is perhaps more accurately described as, for example, heteroactivism, per Browne and Nash (2017), rather than simply 'anti-gender'. As noted already in the conceptualization of resistance, such substantive projects must be understood as something that goes beyond just a reactive response to progressive gains. These 'crusades' (Corrêa & Parker, 2020, p. 14) work towards a particular kind of 'patriarchal dream-order' (Butler, 2024, p. 14). This is a dream-order in which everyone is straight and cis, and in which all children are raised in harmonious nuclear families. It is a dream-order because it never was an empirical reality. It is a fantasy rather than a restoration, 'perhaps [even] a psychosis' (Butler, 2024, p. 15). What is at stake, then, is not simply the defence of a pre-given, constant, patriarchal status quo. Rather, this counter-strategic resistance formulates a substantive vision for society, typically around the defence of the nation and the traditional, hetero- and cis-normative family organized into patriarchal gender roles. The attempt to bring about this order traffics in the lexicon of values (and assaults on them), but it should be noted that it is also a material project. Queer and feminist scholars have long traced how traditional gender norms enlist women's unpaid labour to fill in gaps, particularly in the care economy, left by a retreating neoliberal state (Alexander, 1994). The anti-gender movement is thus an ideological project that organizes the material conditions of society.

Second, in formulating attacks on 'gender', anti-gender ideology as a form of counter-strategic resistance does not hold itself to the standards of accuracy, consistency or coherence. As Butler observes of these counter-discourses, gender becomes a 'phantasm' that collects a variety of contradictory fears and anxieties under one name: 'gender represents capitalism, and gender is nothing but Marxism; gender is a libertarian construct, and gender signals the new wave of totalitarianism; gender will corrupt the nation, like unwanted migrants but also like imperialist powers. Which one is it?' (Butler, 2024, p. 16). The attacks on the concept of gender and progressive politics around it, while driven by linked networks of actors and related strategies, are not consistent in their approach. Rather, these are deeply affective campaigns, in which the rules of logic need not apply. This is how gender can be made to stand in simultaneously for dangerous libertarianism *and* totalitarianism, but also how those enacting cruel policies and calling for harm to be done to the

most marginalized are able to cast themselves in the position of the victim (Hemmings, 2020).

This knowledge about how anti-gender mobilizations work has led scholars studying such attacks to caution us about the limits of using 'backlash' in any kind of mechanistic understanding of cause and effect, whereby progressive gains produce conservative backlash (Ojeda et al., 2024; Paternotte, 2020). The question of whether or not anti-gender attacks are a backlash is not only a conceptual question, but also involves a distinction that has important implications for how to act in the face of counter-strategic resistance. If we understand backlash as a predictable and proportionate reaction to gains that have been won, the reasonable response might be to suggest that we should temper our demands, minimize the risk of backlash and play the long game. This seems to be the logic applied in some accounts of anti-gender backlash. For example, in Hungary, there is intense debate around how to respond to anti-gender attacks (Barát, 2021). Some feminist scholars have concluded that the issue is that feminists are using an ambiguous definition of gender, and that the problem is the queer feminist position that critiques a dimorphic fixation on sex. This 'queerfeminist' understanding of gender is singled out as extreme or confusing, and is portrayed as the cause of right-wing backlash (Kováts, 2020). As Barát (2021, p. 174) argues, 'their logic of argumentation in singling out "queerfeminism" as the main reason for the failure to fight back becomes caught in the Hungarian government's right-wing ideologies, reinforcing division instead of building coalition'. Not only does singling out queer feminism as a culprit undo possibilities for coalition, such claims lend themselves, in the way that trans-exclusionary radical feminism's claims do, to right-wing and anti-gender politics that deny trans liberation (Butler, 2024, pp. 136–137). In continuity with anti-gender attacks, such claims also feature a central contradiction insofar as they call for open debate while insisting that the point of departure for debate should be the a priori conviction that sex is a reliably binary and biologically determined foundation for gender.

In other words, a critical reading of the concept of 'backlash' informed by the anti-gender literature demonstrates that there are politically urgent reasons to be cautious of relying on a mechanistic understanding of the concept. The lesson therefore is: The backlash framing poses both a political and a conceptual problem insofar as it implies that if only strategic resistance were better (more conservative?), it could avoid backlash. Such self-censorship undoes any possibility of understanding feminism as a 'politics of alliance' (Butler, 2024, p. 135) and puts some of its most marginalized subjects in harm's way. It suggests that if only we made more tempered demands, if only we behaved more modestly, we would be safe. This is a losing game. It buys into the old idea of patriarchy as a protection racket (Young, 2003). Instead, we need to recognize the organized and substantive project of anti-gender attacks/counter-strategic resistance and not assume that they are something queer and feminist activism has brought on itself by going too far.

Lesson 3. Reactive Resistance: Identify Spaces for Pedagogical Engagement

Anti-gender movements collect, as we have seen, a variety of fears under the 'phantasm' of gender and channel these into organized political movements. They involve local civil society networks such as the Italian Sentinelle di Piedi (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017, p. 1); authoritarian governments such as those currently in power in Hungary or Turkey (Barát, 2021; Özkazanç, 2024); religious institutions such as the Vatican or US Evangelical churches (Corrêa et al., 2018; McEwen, 2024); international alliances such as the World Congress of Families (Cupać & Ebetürk, 2020); platforms such as Citizen Go, developed in Spain and exported to multiple countries (Obst & Ablett, 2024); and knowledge networks built through the circulation of literature, strategies and, more diffusely, epistemic frames (Almazidi, 2024; Holzberg, 2024). Such formations clearly constitute counter-strategic resistance.

Scholars have identified how, in anti-gender mobilizations, emotions such as *fear* and *hate* of the nonconforming sexual subject, combined with a deep *attachment* to or *love* of a traditional gender order, produce aggressions against marginalized subjects, expressed as what Marcel Obst calls 'hateful love' (Obst, 2024, p. 2; see also Butler, 2024; Hemmings, 2020). At the same time, these accounts point to the fact that the cause of the anxieties that underlie anti-gender mobilizations could instead be identified as insecurities produced by globalization, neoliberalism, militarization and environmental destruction (Graff et al., 2019, p. 550; see also Corrêa & Parker, 2020). In other words, recognizing that fear is at work in anti-gender politics does not amount to accepting that this is a fear that accurately responds to a threat. Rather, it reveals that these movements are fuelled by what Clare Hemmings (2020, p. 32) calls 'affective fictions'. Not only do they misattribute causes of fear, anti-gender attacks externalize blame for their own aggressions as well. Such processes of reversal and inversion enable the Catholic Church to foment panic about gay liberation by mobilizing the spectre of paedophilia. They enable so-called gender-critical feminists to portray trans* women as rapists, even though they are the group most likely to be victimized by cis male violence. It matters little that anti-gender mobilizations misdirect blame for insecurities or that they invert relations of victimization/perpetration if their message is affectively felt.

Thinking with Flynn's concept of reactive resistance opens up the space to recognize that the affective drive behind anti-gender mobilizations can present as resistance in institutional politics without belonging to such conscious and organized political movements as anti-gender mobilizations. It suggests a way of taking the actually felt emotion seriously while challenging the analysis of what produced that feeling of anxiety. Above, I argued for caution when encountering counter-strategic resistance, not to be fooled by its populist claims. Here, I want to cede that there can be modes of resistance that are not anti-gender politics. Flynn's (2001) typology is especially helpful here, as it points to a form of resistance beyond a binary setup of positions for and against WPS or progressive gender politics. She argues that those resisting feminist politics may do so from an emotional, reactive place, rather than

automatically being committed to the patriarchal restorationist projects of anti-gender attacks (see also Butler, 2024, p. 70). I do not want to suggest that the emotional resonances of such claims are somehow apolitical (Ahmed, 2014), but it is helpful to understand that not all such affective responses are socially organized. Not all counter-discourses, in other words, translate into counter-practices (see Introduction this volume). Indeed, it may be an especially fruitful opening to address them before they become part of a larger political movement.

This is not just a question of myth-busting (though it may be helpful to devote some serious discussion to considering who really poses a threat and to whom).[1] It is also important to consider that strategic resistance—contesting imperialist and patriarchal gender norms—involves a pedagogic project for those of us (all of us) who live with and have internalized such norms. Unlearning these norms is thus bound to cause some discomfort. Deborah Britzman (1998, p. 11) writes: 'What education asks of students [is to] confront perspectives, situations, and ideas that may not be just unfamiliar but appear at first glance as a criticism of the learner's view. In all demands, education seems to be asking selves to risk their resistance even as educators have difficulty tolerating the forms working through resistance takes'. This bears out in examining how WPS is institutionalized. A feminist researcher who teaches gender to security sector officials on professional courses remarked to me: 'For gender you need … space…. If you've never thought about this in your whole life, it has so many implications for your private life, for your family, marital relationships, with your friends, so many different aspects…. [You need to create] the space for an opening, for rethinking their own relationship with the world' (Holvikivi, 2024, p. 139). In other words, it is wholly unsurprising that progressive projects such as WPS would provoke discomfort that may be expressed as reactive resistance, given the wide-reaching implications such world-making projects have.

In a pedagogical encounter, resistance is not necessarily a foe to be defeated, but rather a process to be worked through. For example, a UN gender advisor recounted to me having taken a gender advisors' course with several male military officers. She noted that these men started the course grappling with a sense of discomfort around the term 'gender' but finished it with a commitment to gender mainstreaming work: '[In the beginning] I had guys in my group who were all these big military guys and all: "Oh, I'm doing a *gender training*," and making a lot of jokes about it. And then towards the end they were just full-on gender: "How can we do military without gender anymore?" … And they started making jokes about being gender-force, almost being proud about it' (Holvikivi, 2024, p. 94). Such examples demonstrate that leaving open the possibility of understanding resistance as reactive

[1] Affective investments are not necessarily logical. As Butler (2024, p. 251) points out regarding the denial of the legitimacy of trans* and non-binary subjectivities: 'When the anti-gender movement says that gender will strip you of your sexed identity, they are trying to strip a group of people of their sexed identity'. That this fear—the fear of being stripped of one's rights—is actually produced by an inversion of who exactly is stripping rights and from whom does not mean that fear is not nonetheless deeply felt.

can inform an empathetic approach that makes dialogue possible. Of course, fully committed and organized anti-gender activists are not going to be swayed by dialogue—a pedagogical approach is unlikely to get one far with, for example, the Council of Bishops. But maintaining a political openness to encountering people in their discomfort and developing dialogical approaches is nonetheless necessary. If the political imperative for gender-progressive politics is, as Judith Butler (2024, p. 9) calls for, to 'develop a counter-imaginary' that is more appealing than the rights-stripping projects of anti-gender mobilizations, then an approach that is able to deal with reactive resistance and that is able to engage those not already committed to feminist politics is necessary.

The lesson therefore is this: Anti-gender discourses may resonate on an emotional level with a number of people. This does not mean that these people are consciously or fully committed to counter-strategic resistance. There can be, and often is, a gap between counter-discourses and counter-practices. The notion of reactive resistance alerts us to the importance of holding open the possibility that there is a space in which the affective politics of anti-gender mobilizations may be disrupted. It highlights the significance of creating a pedagogical space that allows for important delinkings in the chain of signification of these 'affective fictions' (Hemmings, 2020, p. 32).

Conclusion

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003, p. 1) writes: 'A lot of voices tell us to think nondualistically, and even what to think in that fashion. Fewer are able to transmit how to go about it, the cognitive and even affective habits involved, which are less amenable to being couched in prescriptive forms'. Her wisdom applies here too: If we are to navigate the contestations that institutionalizing WPS norms involves, we need to move beyond a dualistic opposition in which one is either pro gender-equality norms or against them. Studies of escalating attacks on anti-gender movements shows us this much. In a binary oppositional setup, positions become entrenched to the extent that coherence, consistency or the rules of logic need not apply. We need, in other words, a way of thinking non-dualistically about this normative contestation.

In this chapter, I have proposed that the insights from theorizing resistance in the feminist pedagogical literature offer lessons in how to think non-dualistically. This framework provides a way of thinking about the dynamics of resistance within institutions that implement WPS policy and put it into practice. Although the extensive institutionalization of the WPS agenda in the policies and structures of the UN, other international organizations, and national governments and militaries has been remarkably successful, these are not reliably the bastions of gender-progressive politics. In fact, some of them, such as militaries, are institutions of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Kronsell, 2012). All of them operate within a global context of intensifying anti-gender attacks. The success of such institutionalization is thus both

incomplete and contingent. In order to safeguard the progressive gains that have been made, and to advance the unrealized emancipatory potential of the WPS agenda, we need to understand resistance as a multitudinous and shifting terrain, and to identify where pedagogical (both cognitive and affective) engagements are possible and likely to be productive.

In that spirit, this chapter has put forward three lessons on resistance, inspired by Elizabeth Flynn's, 2001 essay. First, it is important that we (those of us committed to feminist politics of gender equality) do not forget the resistant spirit and radical potential of the WPS agenda. Somewhat counterintuitively, this means we should not limit our political ambitions to what seems feasible for the agenda to achieve, but rather that we must also be able to look beyond this policy framework. Second, we must not underestimate the organized and committed nature of anti-gender attacks. Recognizing the transnational networks, funds and strategies deployed in the contemporary context has important implications for whether and how to respond to challenges. But, finally, we must also not be lured into thinking about this contestation in simple binary terms of 'us' and 'them'. Some reactive resistance is inevitable in projects of social transformation and is not automatically undesirable. It is imperative that we move beyond a dualistic mode of thought and learn how to engage the messy and fluid politics of the in-between.

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