

8.3. THE US WAR ON WOMEN: FIGHTING BACK THE ANTI-FEMINIST BACKLASH

Pilar Goñalons Pons ¹

Introduction

Feminist theories stress the centrality of political contestation around gender and sexual relations in the state, political parties and social movements alike. Albeit often inconspicuous, norms about gender relations are intrinsically political matters (Pateman, 1988). Political actors recurrently engage with ideas about femininity, masculinity and sexuality that shape the reproduction and transformation of gender inequalities. Gender politics are, thus, constant but not always visible and/or contested.²

This assertion is readily clear if we compare electoral campaigns over time and examine the recurrent topics of discussion, such as employment, welfare policies, health care, marriage or taxation, to name a few. Although all these areas have important implications for gender inequalities, only sometimes are the gendered aspects manifest and/or problematized to the extent that spur gender conflict. Under certain circumstances, gender conflict even becomes decisive for electoral results. This article seeks to investigate the foundations of such episodes by looking at the 2012 US Presidential election, when gender conflict became highly salient and received the name *war on women*.

The war on women is a catch-all term referring to a series of statements and proposals that challenge gender equality policies and

¹ Pilar Goñalons is a Graduate in Sociology by the University of Barcelona, PhD student and lecturer at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and member of the team of the Social Conflict Watch 2012-13.

² I use *gender politics* as a broad term to indicate the use of normative statements about gender and sexual relations in political arenas. *Gender conflict* is more specific and designates a particular episode during which gender politics are highly contested and politicized, normally involving the direct discussion of diverging views about gender relations.

legislation. These attacks on, mainly, women's rights were hotly contested in the US and echoed by the international media that reported some of its iterations, particularly the most controversial cases about pregnancy, rape and abortion. The war on women, though, not only entails discussions about reproductive health but also equal pay, health care and gender violence.

The war on women represents the activation of political conflict around gender relations, in other words, an increased salience of gender politics. The war on women is a US phenomenon, yet many of its political arguments are not foreign to other contexts. In Spain, conservative proposals to reform the law of abortion and eliminate funds from programs that promote gender equality feature comparable claims. Therefore, studying the US war on women can be useful in order to understand similar processes that activate gender conflict in other polities.

The purpose of this article is twofold. Firstly, I describe the series of events that constitute the war on women. I distinguish three kinds of attacks on gender equality, those concerning the economy, reproduction and violence. Secondly, I draw on scholarly literature to examine the foundations of gender conflict. On the one hand, I analyze what motivates conservatives to mobilize unprogressive views about gender and sexual relations. On the other hand, I examine the strong reaction against such proposals and the success of the war on women frame. I argue that status anxiety in a context of systemic crisis and the joint reaction of institutionalized and grassroots feminist activism are central pieces of this gender conflict episode.

What is the war on women?

Gender politics concern the discussion of power dynamics governing gender and sexual relations. Following Connell, I understand gender not as the male/female dichotomy, but rather as a "structure of social relations that centers on the reproductive arena" (Connell, 2009:10). Gender politics involves a wide variety of expressions, but for

the purpose of this article I distinguish two main positions and three areas of controversy.

I distinguish between feminist and anti-feminist positions. The definition of these concepts is not clear-cut. I adopt Walby's framework and define feminist projects as those which seek to reduce gender inequality, understood broadly and including a variety of initiatives working to transform gender relations towards parity (Walby 2011). Anti-feminist positions resist, challenge and oppose these projects. The war on women can be decomposed as a series of anti-feminist statements and proposals that became hotly politicized during the 2012 US electoral season.

I distinguish three main arenas of contestation within the war on women episode. First, the conflict involved debates about women and men's place in the economy. Second, the war on women addressed the arena of reproductive health and sexuality in relation to abortion, health care and contraception. Finally, this gender conflict also touched on violence against women. The following section reports the events that fall into each of these topics.

The economy

Feminists have long fought for equal access to economic resources (e.g. property rights and jobs), for equal valorization of women's work and skills, and for equal means of independence and autonomy. Women's unequal position in the labor force is one of the main causes of their dependency towards men in marriage and families. In this realm, one of the key goals is to fight against women's exclusion from and discrimination in the labor market. Historically, this struggle has adopted many strategies including actions to condemn sexual harassment in the workplace or campaigns against the unequal division of labor and the devaluation of feminized occupations.

Despite the dramatic increase of women in the formal labor force, inequality and discrimination still persist. The gender wage gap, which compares the average earnings of full-time women and men workers in

the same occupation, shows that US women received 77 cents for each dollar men made in 2011 (Hegewisch and Edwards, 2012). This empirical indicator is regularly used as clear-cut evidence that gender inequality in the labor market persists. In 2012, however, conservative representatives challenged the truth, relevance and significance of such information, arguing that data was “inconclusive” and gender discrimination no longer existent.³

This plea against the gender wage gap is crucial to understand one of their offensives against women’s economic rights: the dispute of the Equal Pay Act. This law, signed in 1963, penalizes discriminatory practices in the labor market, such as paying different wages to women and men in the same job. The legislation represents one of the cornerstone accomplishments of US feminist mobilizations in the 60s, also called second wave feminism. Similar legislation, often called anti-discrimination laws, exists in many other countries. The effectiveness of such laws crucially depends on access to courts. That is, anti-discrimination laws do not eliminate discriminatory practices on their own, but need citizens to sue employers and judges to condemn those who violate the law.

In 2007 a US Supreme Court decision blocked and effectively invalidated the Equal Pay Act by redefining the conditions under which individuals can claim to have been discriminated against. In 2012 Congress debated the Fairness Paycheck Act that sought to reestablish the Equal Pay Act and reopen cases for workplace discrimination. The Act proposal is incontrovertible because it only facilitates lawsuits, demands companies to provide information on their paycheck policy and justify any existing gender inequalities. Yet, conservatives denied the existence of gender discrimination in the workplace and opposed this legislation. As a result, conservatives directly blocked the bill in the Senate on June 5th 2012.

³ For an illustration of this position see the following video (in English, last accessed on Jan 12, 2013): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ta7kLhnx_Uc.

At the state level some conservative governors promoted similar actions. For instance, Governor Scott Walker from Wisconsin signed a law that repealed Wisconsin's Equal Pay Enforcement Act to address workplace discrimination in state courts, and pushed these cases to federal courts which are much more costly and difficult to reach. These attacks on gender economic justice are connected to other proposals that threaten the labor rights of public union employees. Such policies, also called "union busting", are unfolding in several states and target feminized public employee occupations, such as teachers or nurses (Buhle, 2013).

Beyond the direct and dramatic impact of such political proposals on the lives of women and men, the conservative war on women is also discursive in that it attempts to redefine gender inequalities as irrelevant. Anti-feminist arguments deny the existence of unfair wage gaps and instead call them "choices gap", as if these resulted from purely individual and voluntary decisions (e.g. women prefer more flexible or less stressful jobs). These statements not only ignore evidence showing that the gender pay gap cannot be explained by differences in men and women's choices, but also discredit research demonstrating that the so-called "choices" are deeply constrained by other forms of structural discrimination (e.g. lack of affordable child/elder care services or men's resistance to do housework; for a review see England 2005). Gender inequality in the labor market is well and alive. Arguments in the opposite direction constitute a political program that seeks to dismantle women's rights and gender equality. This discursive battle, relevant in each of the topics of the war on women, is no less significant than the tangible consequences of conservative policies.

Reproduction and Sexuality

Exclusion from economic opportunity is one cause of gender inequality, and so is the lack of means to autonomously control reproduction and sexuality. Being able to enjoy sexuality without the

fear of unwanted pregnancy and deciding when and how to get pregnant are crucial aspects that shape women's lives. The US war on women targeted three main forms of reproductive health: abortion, health care and contraception.

Since 1973 abortion is legal in the US during the first trimester, but it can only be publicly funded in cases of rape, incest or health of the mother (*Roe v Wade*, 1973, and Hyde Amendment 1976). Abortion is hotly contested in US politics and conservatives have long attempted to limit the right to terminate unwanted pregnancies. At the state level, many governors passed laws that restrict abortion services through various means. In 2012, conservatives' attempts to exclude rape from the list of publicly funded cases aroused a lot of controversy. The following statements collect the most notorious events of this gender conflict.

On August 19 republican candidate Todd Akin argued that "pregnancy from rape is really rare" and "if it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut the whole thing down". This memorable statement was followed by Tom Smith's declaration which suggested that pregnancy after rape was equivalent to pregnancy before marriage, both illegitimate reasons to seek abortion. On October 23 republican candidate Richard Mourdock claimed that "the only exception I have to have an abortion is in the that case of the life of the mother. I struggled with it myself for a long time, but I came to realize life is that gift from God. I think that even when life begins in that horrible situation of rape, that is something that God intended to happen". Finally, on December 14 judge Derek G. Johnson stated that "I'm not a gynecologist, but I can tell you something... If someone doesn't want to have sexual intercourse, the body shuts down. The body will not permit that [conception] to happen unless a lot of damage is inflicted" (Graff, 2012).

These examples not only attempt to block one of the avenues to terminate unwanted pregnancies, but also challenge the definition and gravity of rape, which is an enormous and prevalent form of violence

against women in the US. Statistics indicate that about 18% of women experience rape at least once in their lifetime (Kilpatrick, Resnick et al., 2007). Conservatives argue that rape can be classified as legitimate or illegitimate. In so doing, they attempt to transform the central criteria of gender violence, release perpetrator's responsibility of their own acts and, yet again, blame women. These examples illustrate the discursive battle being fought in this gender conflict.

The attacks on abortion are related to proposals that limit women's access to healthcare services. Conservatives sought to defund Planned Parenthood, a major institution that provides access to free primary health care services for women, such as ultrasounds, abortion, HIV tests, breast and cervical cancer tests, among other things. Conservatives argue that no public funds should go to any Planned Parenthood services because it "promotes abortion." These claims transform the provision of abortion services into an in-existent campaign and discredit the important work accomplished by this institution. This policy proposal, successful in some states but not at the federal level, seriously limits access to basic health care services which are otherwise unaffordable (there is no universal health care coverage in the US).

In addition to these actions that impair health care access, conservatives challenged Obama's proposal to require health insurance plans to cover recommended contraceptive services (Affordable Care Act⁴). Conservatives strongly criticized this provision. They argued that religious freedom is violated when Christian employers are required to pay for something they stand against to, that is contraceptive pills. Some conservative spokespersons even discredited the importance of contraceptive care indicating the existence of alternative methods, such as "putting Bayer aspirin between their knees" suggested by the billionaire Foster Friess, or accusing all women who use contraceptive

⁴ The Affordable Care Act signed in 2010 sought to facilitate health care coverage and reduce health care costs. More information can be found at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-111hr3590enr/pdf/BILLS-111hr3590enr.pdf>

of being sluts, as Rush Limbaugh did in his popular radio program (Rosen, 2012).⁵

Violence

The use of violence is a central mechanism to police gender relations and oppress mostly women but also men (Walby, 2011). Feminists have long fought for the public acknowledgement of gender violence as punishable crimes and the creation of reparations and services for victims (e.g. MacKinnon, 1987). In 1993 Violence Against Women Act was approved and incorporated some of these demands. This law, which requires periodical renewal, was easily reauthorized in 2000 and 2005. In 2012 the re-authorization included new protections for Native Americans, LGBTQ⁶ cases, and undocumented immigrants.⁷ Conservatives unprecedentedly organized to oppose the bill and effectively blocked its approval. In so doing, they dramatically jeopardize resources needed to maintain shelters, hotlines, and other services.

Media commentators struggled to find reasons explaining why conservatives opposed the bill, since there is no lobbying organization that supports domestic violence. Conservatives used the following two arguments. On the one hand, they claimed that the additional protections go beyond the scope of violence against women and “dilute and weaken” its legal framework. On the other hand, members of the religious right movement, who pressure for the conservatives’ opposition, argued that the violence against women policy costs too much money or, in other words, is an “abuse on taxpayer money”.⁸ These assertions demonstrate conservatives discursive effort to narrow

⁵ For an illustration see ABC’s summary on:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jfb9f7yFYgw>

⁶ Acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual, Queer activism.

⁷ The inclusion of these groups under the Violence Against Women Act is an important accomplishment of activist and lobbying efforts. The following video *I’m here* was the centerpiece of a campaign for immigrant women’s rights:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=jhwhP-ZFbPk

⁸ See Rayfield’s report:

http://www.salon.com/2013/02/06/family_research_council_real_abuse_is_cost_of_vawa_to_taxpayers/

the scope and gravity of violence against women, as they attempted with rape.

In sum, conservatives launched a series of political statements and proposals that directly resist advances in women's rights and gender equality. Did this campaign help Republicans in the Presidential election? The answer is a rotund "No". Commentators agree that the war on women widened the gender gap in vote preference, which gave Barack Obama a solid advantage over Mitt Romney (e.g. see *Huffington Post* or the *Guardian* analyses)⁹. In fact, the 2012 reelection of Obama revealed the largest difference between the percentage of women and men who vote democrat and republican (Gallup survey data)¹⁰.

Making sense of the war on women

The events described above illustrate the centrality of gender politics during the 2012 US Presidential election. Many commentators suggest that the number and intensity of attacks on gender equality is unprecedented. But, is it really? Scholarly literature suggests it is not. In 1992 Susan Faludi published *The New York Times'* best-seller *Backlash: the undeclared war against American women*, describing conservative attacks on women's rights from the 60s to the 90s (Faludi, 1991). More recently, Barbara Finlay published another book titled *George W. Bush and the war on women* (Finlay, 2006). Both accounts provide numerous examples of similar anti-feminist statements and proposals among conservative American politicians. If this political program is not new, what explains the activation of the gender conflict in 2012 and what is unique about it? While there is a lot of literature analyzing specific gender conflicts, there is a surprising lack of systematic research about its temporal and contextual dynamics. To

⁹ Link to *Huffington Post*: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/07/gender-gap-2012-election-obama_n_2086004.html

Link to the *Guardian*: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/nov/07/womens-vote-obama-victory-election>

¹⁰ Link to Gallup report: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/158588/gender-gap-2012-vote-largest-gallup-history.aspx>

craft an answer to these questions I evaluate explanations about the republican agenda, on the one hand, and the dimension of the reaction against it, on the other.

Explaining the backlash

The war on women entails arguments that are deeply gender conservative, statements that reject the existence of gender inequalities, deny the seriousness of violence against women and object women's control over their own bodies. Popular opinions and attitudes do not seem to provide motivations for conservatives' anti-feminist campaign. Their pledge against contraception and abortion runs against what opinion polls suggests is the majority of US inhabitants position: in favor of birth control ¹¹ and Roe v. Wade¹² decision (Gallup survey data). To find an alternative answer I propose to look at institutional, psychosocial and structural processes.

First, I draw from an institutionalist approach to suggest that changes within the composition and organization of the Republican political party transformed its political discourse and ideology. The Republican party has undergone significant alterations for the last few years due to the emergence of the Tea Party movement. Skocpol and Williams find that the rise of the Tea Party powerfully influenced the emergence of certain Republican candidates who shifted the political discourse farther to the right (Skocpol and Williamson, 2012). This grassroots movement opposes "big government" regulations and taxation, including health care and welfare programs for the poor or the younger generations.

Tea Party members are extreme economic libertarians, but it remains unclear whether they are also social conservative regarding

¹¹ Link to Gallup data on birth control:
<http://www.gallup.com/poll/154799/americans-including-catholics-say-birth-control-morally.aspx>

¹² Link to Gallup data on Roe v. Wade (abortion):
<http://www.gallup.com/poll/160058/majority-americans-support-roe-wade-decision.aspx>

gender relations. On the one hand, opinion polls show that tea party supporters take social conservative positions about abortion or same-sex marriage (Pew research data)¹³. Some of the war on women protagonists are indeed endorsed by the Tea Party, such as Phyllis Schlafly who opposes the authorization of the Violence Against Women Act. On the other hand, Williams and Skocpol's research (2011) claims that gender social conservatism is not a defining trait of the Tea Party (Williamson, Skocpol et al, 2011). Although a closer examination of the connections between war on women's spokespersons and the Tea Party movement would be useful to fully explore this hypothesis, I suggest that changes within the Republican party have most likely influenced their anti-feminist mobilization.

Second, I consider psychosocial explanations about extreme-right activism. Surveys show that anti-feminist proposals are not majoritarian, but these opinions do seem to appeal strategic voters of the Republican Party. McVeigh work on social conservative movements proposes that middle class status threat or anxiety triggers their political radicalization and mobilization (McVeigh 2009). He argues that when privileged sources of structural power are being threatened, middle class actors mobilize in defense of the statu quo, which propels radical social conservatism. His logic concurs with research on anti-feminist campaigns, such as Faludi's declaration that "backlashes to women's advancement (...) are hardly random; they have always been triggered by the perception - accurate or not - that women are making great strides" (Faludi, 1991).

I observe some evidence to support this line of reasoning. Popular media has loudly echoed popular stories about the "failing men" and the "raise of women". The publication of Rosin's *The End of Men* (2012) book and articles about the "war on men" in conservative media (e.g. Fox News)¹⁴ resonate with the status anxiety explanation. These

¹³ Pew Research Center report: <http://www.pewforum.org/politics-and-elections/tea-party-and-religion.aspx>

¹⁴ Link to FoxNews report: <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2012/11/24/war-on-men/>

narratives exalt competition between men and women in the workplace as well as the decrease of traditional feminine values, orchestrating the perception that conventional sources of privilege and status are in danger.

Finally, I build on feminist structural theory to highlight the contextual factors associated with the politicization of gender relations. Connell elaborates a framework to analyze historical change in gender relations and suggests that periods of crisis open spaces for redefining gender, in which both conservative and progressive agendas can advance (Connell, 1987). Gal and Kilgman (2000) researched former Soviet Union countries and showed that in contexts of high economic and political turmoil conservative stands on gender relations are mobilized to generate a sense of continuity and stability.

The severity of the current economic crisis can be seen as an impasse that not only shapes individuals attitudes, as indicated by the status-threat perspective, but also transforms the structural incentives for gender politics. I observe a set of concrete tendency crises consistent with this interpretation. Concerns about low fertility and the decline of white population in the US motivate pro-fertility discourses and politics that run against women's reproductive rights (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Capitalist economic crisis and efforts to combat unemployment often motivate the expulsion and/or exploitation of certain groups in the labor market, such as women (Connell, 1987; Wolf, 2012). And the crisis of the democratic system, manifest in low voting turnouts and minor credibility, pushes politicians to look for sources of moral legitimacy. Gender politics and particularly reproductive rights are common arenas to pursue such goals (Gal and Kligman, 2000).

Explaining the reaction against the backlash.

While US Republican gender conservatism is not new, undeniably some of its underlying causes are specific to the current context. I argue that what is really unique about the 2012 gender conflict is the strong reaction against anti-feminism, which pushed gender politics near the

epicenter of the electoral campaign. The success of the war on women frame illustrates a powerful refusal of conservative proposals. The war on women frame was a popular phrase, not only in marginal progressive media but also in mainstream media, such as *The New York Times* or *Washington Post*.¹⁵ My final task concerns the examination of the conditions propelling such successful contestation of anti-feminism. I consider feminist organizations, institutionalized feminism and the diffusion of feminist ideas in popular culture.

The first obvious candidate to explain a strong anti-feminist reaction would be feminist organizations. If the influence of these actors was stronger than before, that could explain why the reaction against the 2012 backlash was so uniquely powerful. However, traditional feminist organizations and lobbying activity does not appear to be as visible or strong as it was in the past (Reger, 2012). In fact, contemporary US feminist activists have a hard time identifying visible figures or leaders of the movement (Reger, 2007). Reger's research shows that feminist organizing is culturally diffused in popular culture and community grassroots organizing that locate feminism "nowhere and everywhere" (Reger, 2012). The diffuse nature of contemporary activism is insufficient to launch such influential counter-narrative to conservative proposals, although it was crucial to guarantee its success and dissemination.

The review of events indicates that Democratic spokespersons played a key role launching the war on women frame on mainstream media.¹⁶ In fact, Democrat criticism towards Republican anti-feminist proposals has been one of the "talking points" of the electoral campaign (Weigel, 2012). The Democratic party served as an institutional platform to propel the struggle against anti-feminism. These observations can be interpreted in different ways, some might see it as a purely electoral

¹⁵ Link to *New York Times* editorial:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/20/opinion/sunday/the-attack-on-women-is-real.html?pagewanted=print>

¹⁶ Link to the article that first refers to the *war on women*:
<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0411/52793.html>

strategy, while others might read it as evidence of institutionalized feminist influence on political parties.

Notwithstanding the role of strategy, I argue that Democrats' promotion of the war on women frame denotes at least some sympathy towards certain feminist goals. Sylvia Walby suggests that feminist agents within institutions constitute one of the central features of contemporary feminism. Her last book, which seeks to criticize statements claiming that feminism is dead, argues that "feminism is taking powerful new forms, which make it unrecognizable to some" (Walby, 2011:1). Feminist influence from within political parties or unions constitutes one of these new forms of contemporary feminist activism. Some observations concur with Walby's perspective. For instance, Nancy Pelosi, who has been featured and endorsed by feminist media like MsMagazine,¹⁷ was the first Democratic representative to popularize the phrase *war on women*.

In sum, I argue that institutionalized feminism can favor the initiation of campaigns against anti-feminism, but their success depends on popular resonance. The war on women frame strongly echoed an important body of voters and media commentators, exhibiting the cultural diffusion of feminist ideas. The magnitude of anti-feminist backlash opposition appears to be what really made this episode distinctive from previous ones. What remains to be seen is whether Democrats will preserve these feminist claims during their mandate.

Whose struggles has the war on women represented?

Before concluding, I assess the scope of the war on women. Contemporary feminist activism is increasingly taking an intersectional approach, which stresses the interrelation between different systems of oppression across social categories of inequality, such as sexuality, race, class, age, disability, among others (Walby, 2008). Intersectionality stresses that not all feminist goals address everyone's

¹⁷ Link to MsMagazine piece on Nancy Pelosi:
<https://msmagazine.com/blog/2012/11/15/nancy-pelosi-is-still-leader-of-the-pack/>

concerns in the same way and that setting priorities is a controversial matter. For instance, ranking reproductive rights before welfare benefits for single mothers puts the interests of certain groups ahead of others. This example is commonly used to criticize US feminism for being predominantly white and bourgeois.

My observations indicate that US 2012 gender conflict was based on a narrow understanding of gender equality that overrepresented white middle-class women. Single, professional and university educated women dominated the political imaginary, while ethnic minorities and low-income women's demands were only marginally considered. The phrase *war on women* also denotes the exclusion of gender politics concerning transexual, cisgender, queer and men. Sexuality was considered in relation to women's health and wellbeing, but not in relation to LGBTQ issues. The conservative agenda on reproductive health also runs against core demands of transexual activism, yet their claims never reached mainstream media. And other themes that did make it into the political campaign -most importantly marriage equality- appeared to be disconnected from the war on women framework, despite the fact that these struggles share central critiques to the family as an institution.

In 2012 resistance against anti-feminism successfully connected gendered grievances across several arenas -the economy, reproduction and health care- but failed to connect sexism to hetero/gender-normativity, racism and economic liberalism. This reflects that war on women spokespersons confined their strategy to oppose conservative aggressions but did not produce an alternative political agenda. This, I believe, is a critical limitation of the feminist mobilization and a missed opportunity to introduce an intersectional approach to discuss gender politics.

Concluding remarks

Backlashes against gender equality are becoming widespread in the current context of economic crisis and neoliberal politics. We can

already observe anti-feminist initiatives in the arena of reproductive politics in Spain or Ireland (Cooper, 2012). The so-called necessary policy packages to reduce public spending dismantle policies that promote gender equality. Moreover, the decline of middle class households and masculine employment might well trigger a status threat reaction among privileged strata and fuel anti-feminist attitudes.

I stressed that both tangible political measures and discursive strategies are central to the conservative agenda. Anti-feminist backlash not only cuts rights but also seeks to redefine gender inequality as inexistent, violence against women as unimportant, reproductive health as apolitical, and deny that gender equality and feminism are central humanitarian and democratic values. Altogether these efforts try to push gender politics back to the private sphere, an old strategy employed to reproduce patriarchy (Pateman, 1988). Resisting the backlash involves both criticizing these political initiatives and transforming the frames of discussion.

Feminists across the ocean agree that these backlashes represent a set-back on gender equality, but their influence to reach mainstream media diverges. If one lesson can be learned from the US' war on women is that exposing the gendered nature of several policies -from privatizing health care to restricting abortion- can successfully build a strong coalition to support gender equality. A stronger campaign would be able to communicate that marriage equality and comprehensive reproductive care including all sexual diversities also constitute the feminist agenda. For all that to happen, the interaction between institutionalized figures and popular resonance appears to be crucial.

This article argues that gender politics not only concern women, but broadly involve the contestation and politicization of gender and sexual relations. As such, gender conflict can be found in different arenas and the task of feminist scholars concerns exposing the systematic links across these dimensions. The war on women demonstrates the relevance of gender politics within unfolding processes of social change.

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