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Feminist Research Series White Paper
“Violence, Backlash and Resistance: Some Preliminary Thoughts”
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*Note: All sources cited in the paper are from the workshop’s annotated bibliography. Please refer to it for full reference entries.

In the typical usage of VAWIP the collective affected, women, invites immediate questions of which women we're focusing on, and how certain we should be that we are speaking of the broad community of women, or more specific subsets. With that in mind, I suggest some aspects that I, at least as a first cut, think important considerations. I begin by sketching out a rough definition of the terms backlash, violence, and resistance. Alongside the discussion of definitions of the three terms, I indicate some considerations on how to conceive of the ideas and the form in which they should be measured. I end with a rough typological sketch that attempts to bring some of the elements I address together.

After reading through some of the literature on VAWIP and related terms, two things are striking. First, there's not necessarily much discussion about resistance; and second, even less that treats it as a concept possibly distinct from backlash. Even some who appear to use the term in an explicit manner leave it undefined. Chawla et. al (2017, 3) are something of an exception in this case, understanding resistance as a concept "which may include physical and sexual violence; social and familial censure; ostracization by the religious community; and various overt or subtle forms of restriction, deprivation, and exclusion—varies according to multiple factors, including but not limited to gender norms, the broader cultural context, regime type, local power structures, economic opportunities, and the form of participation sought." Where the previous comment refers more to an empirical take on resistance, the authors do approach something closer to a loose definition of the concept, or at least some of its parameters in a later discussion, "resistance refers to actions and attitudes ranging from unintentional hostility through physical violence in response to women's political and civic participation," (Chawla et al 2017, 6, emphasis in original). Following other work on the topic including (from my perspective) Mansbridge and Shames (2008), the authors then move to introduce resistance

as something entrenched, and potentially, per Krook (2016, 2017) political opportunity structure-like.

Yet, Chawla et al (2017) go on to conceptualize resistance as a typology of low, moderate, and high levels of resistance, conceptualizing it as action based or behavioral, in particular as related to forms and degrees of violence that might be perpetrated as a result. However, if we conceive, as I think is right, of resistance as entrenched and political opportunity structure like, then a strict behavioral approach to resistance seems set-up to ignore the discursive and structural components of entrenched resistance. Given the term itself – *entrenched* resistance – this is not a minor concern. At this point it strikes me as especially notable that we lack a good working definition of resistance, and that this seems to be the case in part because the idea, or at least discussion of it, is somewhat new, but also because it's one of those terms that seems obvious, and thus may not invite us to spend as much time in consideration of what it means. I don't say that because I offer an especially complex and nuanced intervention; rather, I raise the point because of the tendency for undefined concepts to have sometimes conflicting elements – identity comes to mind here – that thus require the researcher to make patently clear which one is under consideration.

I understand resistance to mean variable degrees of hostility to structural change, informed by context, where structural change refers to the structure, that is, the organization and distribution, of power. Entrenched resistance/resistance refers to hostility to changes to the status quo; or hostility to the redistribution of power. I understand these to mean the same idea expressed using different words. Returning to my concern about resistance as typological, I would suggest that the working definition proposed here invites a consideration of resistance as structuring, and thus as a first order phenomenon. That is, per the definition here it is somewhat

unclear how we get to violence and/or backlash, without resistance appearing first. So resistance a) precedes backlash, at least in the first instance b) precedes and possibly interacts, with violence and c) is a feature of across and within all states. Moreover, I argue that we should consider resistance in terms of degree, rather than type. And, to the point that resistance is a feature of all states, I borrow from another measure used to assess a feature of all states. I offer that we conceptualize resistance somewhat like the GINI index. In that case the 0-1 scale outlines the conceptual ceiling and floor, but in empirical observation we are more likely to find cases that hover across a narrower spectrum leaving the space around the floor and the ceiling open; say in the 0.3-0.6 or 0.7 range.

I find this idea compelling in the sense that the scale reflects a couple key points: first, if we understand resistance as entrenched, then that means that it occurs everywhere, or more precisely that it works everywhere as a structuring mechanism that interacts with violence, and has the potential to directly affect backlash. Every site has a baseline level of backlash, and while that measure might be closer to or further away from the floor, the scalar model invites us to view resistance as something omnipresent, and which can scale up or down, but not so much in the sense of a mutually exclusive low and high. That is because the lowest cells, the 0.0 to 0.3 range in my example, remain unoccupied, as do the highest ranges. This doesn't buy us entirely out of the tendency to adopt binary views of the world, whereby the western and western like states score "good" and the developed world score "bad," but it does begin to shift the perception from binary to a matter of degree.

I wish to make a similar argument for a conceptualization of violence, and its relationship to resistance. I start with the note that, by violence I mean something like negative acts or outcomes perpetrated by a person or group against another person or group, either from a space

of intention or disregard. Though definitionally distinct, my perception of violence as it works in practice is that it has high overlap with resistance; this idea seems to align somewhat with Chawla et al (2017, 4) who argue “Strong resistance, including arson and murder, does emerge in several sources, and, not surprisingly, has a deleterious effect on women’s participation. But, it is not as widespread as moderate resistance (such as sexual harassment and physically blocking women’s access to spaces of decision-making) or low resistance (such as stereotyping or the enforcement of women’s invisibility), both of which limit women’s civic and political participation, but rarely discourage most women from entering political and civic spaces altogether.”

I worry that the hierarchy assumed here may not look the same in other contexts, and moreover, that elements understood as operating in different nodes in the authors’ hierarchy are not in fact so distinct in some contexts. The sexual harassment/murder distinction comes particularly to mind, as there are some places in which the one leads so directly to the other that we can call them both murder, in summary form. The only difference might be who is the final perpetrator of the violence, and thus how it might be classified by a non-attentive (to context) coder – as VAWIP in one case, and as familial murder/domestic violence in another. But there is good likelihood that in at least some cases a rape, for instance, may be used with the express intention that it will result in murder – and even better, from the rape perpetrator’s perspective, a murder for which he will not be held legally (or likely even socially responsible). In other cases the intention may not be so explicit, and yet, if any logical consideration of the outcome would lead to a recognition that murder is a very high probability, then the fact remains that distinguishing these forms of violence in hierarchical form is potentially problematic. As a final point, it may already be clear that, though the cases I just described are likely to happen between

two individuals operating in a specific setting, such as the legislative milieu, the violence that I've described and the ends for which it is perpetrated are not entirely distinct from those associated with rape and other sexual assault and gendered violence as weapons of war. That is, not only is there a concern about the use of typology, and particularly about the use of a hierarchical typology, but a concern about presumptions of scale as well.

What this suggests is the need to address violence in a multi-scalar rather than a typological format as well. I am not troubled by the idea of lower and higher levels of violence but, to my mind, overlapping a conception of levels alongside physical and non-physical (and within those categories, more and less egregious forms of each type) may not be the most fruitful, or rather the most accurate, approach. These are nothing more than suggestions, but two additional ways of classification come to mind: perhaps we could create the ideal-typical categories around the level of aggression involved and/or the level of harm experienced by the person or group; where this is understood in an integral form – that is body and mind. It is increasingly apparent that mental harms can be a source of significant and long-lasting damage to the victim(s) and, moreover, the most effective physical crimes are those that instill a sense of fear, vulnerability, and other elements that refer back to crimes against the mind. These points are exacerbated by the fact that non-physical, mentally abusive forms of violence are insidious, often covert (even, and especially to their recipients) and thus can create equally extensive baseline levels of damage as is so for physical violence. Furthermore this potentially equally extensive damage can be much *more* extensive in terms of time and covertness. Perhaps one useful approach to conceptualizing violence in a way that lends itself toward typology while retaining a degree based form of measurement is to divide the categories into overt violence, and latent violence,

without pre-assigning specific types of violence (e.g. assault vs. negative use of agenda-setting powers) to one category or the other; at least not without further scrutiny.

Finally, I use what appears to be a consensual working definition of backlash as a sudden, negative reaction stemming from the perception that change is going too far, too fast. A typological, multi-site approach strikes me as perfectly appropriate here, so I have less reflection to offer, except in regard to one point. While I don't know quite how, or whether, this matters, it's important to note that this definition of backlash presumes there to be some threshold that structures some level of either indifference to, tolerance of, or perhaps even objective support for, equality (which is left undefined) that, once crossed, creates conditions for backlash. This distinction seems to presume that there is an "equality camp" that will support change to a point, and another camp that is uninterested in much, if any change away from the status quo at all. On the one hand this maps fairly precisely to the broad binary drawn in the literature, and in this paper. Yet, framed in this way I'm not sure I'm entirely convinced of the value of this assumed distinction. I don't have a solid suggestion to offer; instead I simply raise the point that the working conception of equality is important here. The baseline conception seems to be a version of women are the same as men, or can do anything men can do, . . . That is, the baseline conception hues tightly to a western, liberal democracy model of equality which itself has long been a point of contestation.

Given all this, what relations or patterns might we hypothesize? I propose a kind of cell typology as a first cut. What seems important across the three concepts is the role that time and degree play. That is, we understand degree to be important to both the concepts of resistance and violence, and time as important to backlash. I sketch these in a rough table that suggests a way to categorize them, but which highlights the point that cells can hold multiple nodes and which

takes the comparative adjectival form (using the -er ending) to remind us of the need to retain these interactions as occurring along at least one or more spectra.

DEGREE OF RESISTANCE	TIME FRAME		
		More Immediate Resistance	Longer Standing Resistance
	Lower-Level Violence (Scale: 0-5)	Backlash	Openness/More Open; Pre-backlash?
	Higher-Level Violence (Scale: 5-10)	Overt (harsh) Violence (Level 1 power)	Covert or Latent Violence (Level 3 Gaventa; some Level 2)