

Beyond depoliticisation: the multiple politics of gender expertise

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I. Introduction¹

The adoption of gender mainstreaming, the broader professionalization of international development practice and the move towards evidence-based and expert-led policy-making, have created an increasing demand for gender experts. These experts are employed by many (international) governmental and non-governmental organisations and work in multiple issue areas, including development, security, human rights, agriculture, refugees, migration and health. They are hired to implement gender mainstreaming, to generate new knowledge about gender, and to spread gender equality considerations through organizational structures and projects. The underlying idea is that the integration of gender experts and gender expert knowledge into existing institutions and programmes redresses gender inequalities and promotes women's empowerment.

This endeavour is highly contested for various reasons and the critiques are well rehearsed in the feminist literature by now (for example Ferguson 2014; see also other contributions to this volume). Some critics argue that gender experts do not have the necessary authority to bring about change towards gender equality and that the translation of feminist into policy-making through gender mainstreaming leads to the evaporation of gender concerns (Porter and Sweetman 2005). Others critique the lacking accountability of gender experts to feminist activist constituencies, co-opting feminist empowerment agendas (Baden and Goetz 1997; Makibaka 1995; Hemmings 2011). Worse still, gender expertise and experts are suspected of being complicit in entrenching neoliberal agendas detrimental to feminist goals (Fraser 2009). In this context, gender experts and gender expertise have been accused of contributing to technicalising and depoliticising feminist agendas (Desai 2007, 801). Critics fear that through approaching feminist concerns in apolitical and technical ways, gender expert knowledge no longer serves feminist goals. More broadly, these developments of expertisation and professionalization beg the questions of what counts as authoritative knowledge on gender, who is (legitimately) involved in producing such knowledge, who speaks where and when, who gets heard and whose words count, and what forms of knowing other-wise exist.

¹ Research for this chapter was carried out in the context of a collaborative research project on gender experts and gender expertise and I am grateful for stimulating discussions with my project colleagues Katarzyna Grabska, Françoise Grange Omokaro, Elisabeth Prügl, Hayley Thompson and Christine Verschuur at the Graduate Institute in Geneva. I would like to thank the editor Christine Verschuur for her patience, and Fenneke Reysoo for her very helpful comments on an earlier version of this chapter. Special thanks go to my conversation partners for taking time to talk. Funding by the Swiss National Science Foundation is gratefully acknowledged [PA00P1_145335 and 100017_143174].

This chapter argues that the concept of depoliticisation is helpful as a starting point for a critique of the bureaucratic cooptation and instrumentalisation of gender transformation agendas. Yet, framing the issue in terms of depoliticisation risks rendering silent and invisible the multiple politics of gender expert knowledge. There is also a risk that in an attempt to repoliticise we engage in recovering or repairing a feminist agenda that has supposedly been lost or damaged through the translation into gender expertise. This reproduces the imaginary of the existence of a single 'pure' feminist agenda. I propose to shift the focus away from trying to recover such an agenda to explore the when and where of the existing politics of gender expert knowledge and activities. Rather than focusing on the depoliticisation of gender expertise, this chapter seeks to engage with existing political spaces as understood and practiced by gender experts. It invites us to use the opportunity of the debate around the expertisation of gender knowledge to ask questions about the politics and power relations within which all forms of knowledge (on gender issues) are embedded. This means starting with the assumption that all knowledge is inherently political and that all forms of knowing are linked to power relations and redirecting our focus to analyse the politics and power linked to knowing and knowledge. Even in supposedly depoliticised activities the political is always present.

I present a number of vignettes drawing on reflexive writings by gender experts as well as my own interviews with gender experts. This chapter comes out of a broader research project on the various sites and networks of gender expert activities that includes a corpus of more than 100 interviews and focus group discussions with international and national gender experts working internationally and in Liberia and Nepal, representatives of various international governmental and non-governmental institutions, (women's) civil society organisations, and 'beneficiaries' of gender mainstreaming programmes, as well as participant observation of gender training and awareness raising events.² This chapter does not focus on one particular geographical area or a particular type of gender expert, but rather draws on a variety of areas and types in order to illustrate the multiple politics of gender expertise.

In the next section, I situate my contribution within the debate regarding the depoliticisation of gender knowledge and shift the focus on the politics of knowledge and gender expert activities. Section three draws on reflexive writings of gender experts in order to analyse the sites of the political in their work and the ways in which they have dealt with the politics of gender expertise. In the fourth section, I explore the sites of the politics of expert activities in my interviews with gender experts.

II. Gender expertise and depoliticisation

² Special thanks go to all my respondents for taking time to talk with me, and to my local research partners in Liberia and Nepal: Kou Gbaintor-Johnson and Lekh Nath Paudel for stimulating cooperation. This research would not have been possible without them. The interviews were carried out during 2012-2016. They have been anonymised to guarantee confidentiality.

The notion of depoliticisation refers to the process whereby an issue is removed from the political realm, from political debate, into the realm of expertise through which it becomes a technical question and an object of expertise (Baden and Goetz 1997; Mason 2013; Mukhopadhyay 2004; Mukhopadhyay 2014; Verloo 2001; Lombardo and Meier 2006). For example, feminist authors have argued that the issue of gender equality becomes depoliticised through reducing it to checklists, gender training toolkits or 'gender washing' of policy documents (Mukhopadhyay 2004; Mason 2013). Thereby, the concern is that gender mainstreaming becomes part of an 'add women and stir' approach (Ertürk 2004, 6–7) and that gender experts contribute to turning feminist insights "into managerial solutions" that do not address structural gender inequalities (Desai 2007, 801). Baden and Goetz warn that gender mainstreaming can operationalise gender in a way to ignore power and relationality: "Bureaucratic requirements for information tend to strip away the political content of information on women's interests and reduce it to a set of needs or gaps, amenable to administrative decisions about the allocation of resources" (Baden and Goetz 1997, 7). Finally, there is also concern about gender expert knowledge replacing other forms of knowledge about gender.

The concept of depoliticisation is helpful as a starting point for a critique of the increasing bureaucratic cooptation and instrumentalisation of feminist agendas. It also highlights the basis upon which certain gender experts draw their authority, and points to the implications of the ways in which gender expertise has become reduced to 'technical' activities, such as revising documents to insert gender concerns and terminology or drafting gender checklists.³ This might also contribute to encourage gender experts to pause their activities now and then to ask more fundamental questions about the forms and implications of their knowledge and practice.

Yet, framing the increasing number of gender experts and the professionalization of gender expertise in terms of depoliticisation risks silencing and rendering invisible the politics of expert knowledge and practice. Somewhat paradoxically, framing the debate in terms of depoliticisation, (we analysts) can contribute to invisibilise the politics of gender expert knowledge by focusing all our attention on demonstrating to what extent and how depoliticisation happens. I experienced first-hand this risk of framing gender expertise work in terms of depoliticisation during my research in Nepal and Liberia. In an attempt of slight provocation, one of the questions I asked in my conversations with international and national gender experts was whether gender expertise was a purely technical and apolitical matter that led to marginalise activism around gender issues. For example, I was given the following answers:

³ I would like to thank Fenneke Reysoo for reminding me that this trend started in the 1970s for instance with the gender impact assessment tools. Yet, the extent and scope of this phenomenon has increased significantly in recent years with the professionalisation of gender expertise.

I think it depends on where you are. It really does. I agree that maybe for some positions and things, yes, that is the case. You may be a technocrat in the UN and that's the way you operate. Those who are on the ground and have to do the grass root work is not that at all. It's serious business. (Liberian gender expert, Monrovia, 2013)

I think it is a mixture of both. There will always be the technical aspect; there will always be the political aspect. To effectively achieve the implementation or the adherence to gender principles, you need political work... So you need them both. It's not just having a technician. You will think and think and think, and write the books. You can write as many as you can, but if no one listens to you it will just remain your ideas. (Liberian gender expert, Monrovia, 2013)

Through their nuanced answers, my conversation partners gently opened my eyes to the various sites of politics in the context of their work and beyond, and redirected my attention to issues and framings that they found more pertinent in order to narrate the complexity of their experiences as gender experts. They also (implicitly) challenged the dichotomy between technical and political dimensions of gender mainstreaming. Their answers illustrate the interlinking of various gender mainstreaming strategies and the messy reality of gender expertise work whereby even seemingly technical instruments can be deeply political. Focusing solely on depoliticisation processes and upholding the dichotomy prevents us from seeing these links and political spaces.

Second, framing the debate in terms of depoliticisation tends to direct our focus on attempts to recover or repair a feminist agenda that has supposedly been lost or damaged through the translation into gender expertise. Thereby, there is a risk of reproducing the imaginary of the existence of a single, pure feminist agenda (Hemmings 2011, 432). Yet, we need to explore which feminism/s are being recovered in this process? And how could this attempt contribute to further entrench existing hierarchies among different forms of knowledge on gender issues?

Third, underlying the concept of depoliticisation is the assumption that gender expertise is something relatively stable. Yet, it has been shown that expertise is inherently unstable and constantly needs to be reaffirmed. Thus, for example, in her analysis of the global governance of development finance, Best reveals the fragile, contingent and contested character of expertise (Best 2014). Her analysis “takes not just the experts but also the idea of expertise itself down from its pedestal and shows just how fragile and approximate it really is – examining how those who participate within the culture of expertise work pragmatically and imperfectly to maintain their authority” (Best 2014, 68). If this is true for development finance expertise, it most definitely holds for gender expertise, which is a much less professionalised and authority-imbued form of expertise. Some experts perceive this relative fragility of gender expertise to be a fundamental problem and weakness, which contributes to professionalization attempts. Yet, this inherent fragility of expertise allows for spaces that can unsettle existing ways of knowing and defining issues and

provoke renegotiation and transformation. Drawing on these insights allows us to identify multiple spaces of politics in the context of gender expert activity.

This chapter is an invitation to use the opportunity of the debate around the professionalization and expertisation of gender knowledge in order to ask questions about the politics and power relations of gender expert knowledge and practice. If we start with the assumption that gender expert knowledge and practice is inherently fragile and political and involves power relations, we can redirect our focus towards analysing politics and power. This is in line with several decades of feminist theorising aimed at expanding the definition of 'politics' and resonates with a multi-disciplinary literature on "everyday politics", "micropolitics" and the "mundane" (Elias and Roberts 2016; Enloe 2011; Enloe 2001; Davies 2003; Hobson and Seabrooke 2007; Lefebvre 2010; Scott 2008; Kerkvliet 2005; Chowdhry and Nair 2004; Certeau 1980). In various ways, this literature pays attention to multiple, small-scale, subtle, sometimes hidden or marginalised sites and forms of politics and highlights their relevance for transformation and their connection to global politics. In the next section, the analysis focuses on how politics is understood and practiced in reflexive writings of gender experts, whereas section four will focus on vignettes from my interviews with gender experts.

III. Beyond depoliticisation

A number of authors who have worked as gender experts themselves have called for taking seriously the experiences of gender experts in order to highlight the variety of gender expertise work and to tease out the tensions and complexities of this work (Ferguson 2014; Hertzog 2011; Mukhopadhyay 2014; Jauhola 2013; Harcourt 2015; Bustelo, Ferguson, and Forest 2016). Their reflexive writing helps to bring back into focus the politics of gender expert knowledge and practice. They show how the figure of the gender expert epitomises many dilemmas, such as the urgency of action paradox, the instrumentalisation trap, and the dilemma of imperialism versus anti-feminism. Yet, they also highlight how there is always, albeit sometimes a small, space for contestation, negotiation and alternative visions and practice, even in the process of gendering policy or project documents. Moreover, the work of gender experts takes place in many sites that provide the opportunity for encounters and entanglements that can be deeply political.

Ferguson draws on first-hand experience as a gender expert to explore what it means to work within the 'business case for gender equality' framework and to bring the expert's voice to the centre of the analysis (Ferguson 2014). She illuminates the challenges of being a gender expert and the "fine details of compromise and negotiation involved in practising gender expertise". She also reflects on "the possibilities for gender expertise as a form of feminist political action in international organisations" (Ferguson 2014, 2–3). Ferguson emphasises the risk that gender expertise contributes to legitimise institutions that pay lip service to gender equality and to lend credibility to neoliberal development projects. Yet, she also identifies sites in which there is space for

feminist politics in gender expertise activity: the daily practice of gender experts includes various possibilities to discuss feminist issues with various people and to influence agendas. In order to take advantage of these sites, one needs to pay attention to “microtransformations and unexpected consequences that result from our practices as gender experts” (Ferguson 2014, 15). Such microtransformations can include debates in the context of workshops, trainings or everyday conversations that push people to confront their assumptions and prejudices and change their attitudes or behaviour (Ferguson 2014, 15).

Based on her experience as a gender consultant for a women’s empowerment programme, focusing on literacy classes, as part of a World Bank funded irrigation project in rural Nepal in 1997, Hertzog analyses the politics of development and gender interventions (Hertzog 2011). She highlights the dilemmas that (external) gender consultants face and the ways in which they shape – and are shaped by – neocolonial development bureaucracies, contributing to patronising, marginalising and controlling the supposed beneficiaries of women’s projects instead of their empowerment. Hertzog provides an in-depth and self-reflexive analysis of the complex power relations involved in gender expert activities. Reflecting on her role as a gender expert in this programme, she analyses her own involvement in gendered and neo-colonial encounters, both as a perpetrator and a victim. Importantly, she reveals the vulnerability of gender experts and the fragility of the basis of their expertise, and the ways in which women project beneficiaries use this for their own purpose. Recognising and zooming in on the fragility and vulnerability of gender experts and gender expertise opens possibilities to focus on spaces for contestation and negotiation as well as unintended consequences. This reveals how project beneficiaries of gender mainstreaming initiatives create spaces for contesting authority and power hierarchies. For example, the Nepali women ‘beneficiaries’ of the project used the negotiations over literacy classes (which were not desired by the women in the first place and which did not materialise) as an opportunity to extract other resources from the women’s project, resisting unwanted ‘empowerment from outside’ and turning project ‘failure’ to their own benefit.

In an effort to reconceptualise the meaning and identity of gender experts and expertise Jauhola has coined the term of the “queered gender advisor”, “who instead of ‘knowing gender’, would have the task of interrupting the processes of knowing and subverting the normalised understandings of gender” (Jauhola 2013, 174). This leads away from an understanding of feminist knowledge as expertise towards gender as a critical analysis for disruption and contestation. This challenges an understanding of gender expert knowledge as a form of ‘possessive’ knowing, capturing, controlling and imposing. Instead, gender expertise becomes understood and practiced as an activity of deconstruction, disruption and permanent provocation (Jauhola 2013, 30). It opens up space to recognise the political potential for displacement, engagement and solidarity in encounters in the context of gender expert activity. Such a form of

knowledge does not rely on expertise knowledge on feminist theory or gender issues, but can take a variety of actions or inactions. In this sense, queered gender advisors and researchers could play a potentially disruptive and contesting role. Yet, this requires resisting the colonial urge to 'change the other' and a critical (self-)reflection on the position of advisors and researchers (Ahmed 2013). Jauhola also proposes to recognise the researcher's position as political and situated: "seeing, listening, recording and interpreting the struggle over meanings is a conscious feminist process of making the negotiated gender-norm-making visible, yet remaining cautious of the western (feminist, academic) desire to be the one who knows and determines authenticity" (Jauhola 2013, 29). As feminist researchers, we also need to be more self-reflective of our own involvement in the circulation of feminist knowledges and their conceptualisation (Ferguson 2014; Jauhola 2013). Here, the politics lies in sites of contestation, self-reflexivity and accepting the challenge of displacement and encounters (Ahmed 2013).

These reflexive writings by gender experts show the dilemmas and paradoxes as well as the vulnerability and fragility of gender expertise. They also allow us to identify a number of ways in which to explore the politics of gender expertise. First, they emphasise the need to enact a "dual politics of possibilities – a pragmatic politics of what is possible within the current conjuncture and a visionary politics of what can be possible – even as we recognize the power and complicity of some of us" (Desai 2007, 801). This highlights the co-existence of complicity alongside various small and large, short- and long-term spaces for subversion and resistance. Second, they show the microtransformations, everyday politics and unexpected consequences resulting from gender expert practice. Third, the figure of the 'queered gender advisor' makes clear that moments of problematisation and disruption are intensely political. Finally, they exemplify how self-critical reflection on our own practices as gender experts or researchers studying gender expertise can open up space to see the political. Inspired by these writings, I now present a number of vignettes of the ways in which my respondents conceptualise and practice the politics of gender expertise.

III. The politics of gender expertise

My interviews with gender experts illustrate the variety of sites and forms of politics associated with gender expert practice. This is not an exhaustive analysis of the politics of gender expertise, and neither does it provide a detailed analysis of the particular contexts within which these experts work. Rather, the aim is to provide insights into the multiplicity of the when and where of the political in gender expert practice.

The first vignette is from an interview with a Nepali gender expert working with an international NGO that promotes radio programmes to transform gender relations and gendered social behaviour. I asked him how their programmes touch on issues such as gender and masculinity:

Respondent: What we do is we touch on this issue with utmost sensitivity. Masculinity is something that is discussed in hush-hush

circles at times. A boy needs to act like a boy, a girl needs to act like a girl. What we do is we tend to challenge those notions through the program. For example, sometimes in the chat I tell my listeners that I cooked, I cleaned, I washed. I was late to come in the studio today because I was washing my clothes. In that way we're actually making a point saying that masculinity is something that's in your mind. For example, guys in Nepal would never admit that they are good cooks because that is a girl's work. Through radio dramas, through interviews, through hosts, and chat we do that. Recently, we had this sex change drama, which sparked a lot of debate. What we did was we made a radio program where a boy has menstruation. In that way we received a lot of hate SMS as well, like "that is ridiculous, how can you make a drama where a guy has menstruation!". Then we talked about it's not about masculinity, it's something that is fed on you. It's more like a socially-advised, socially-dictated behavior that is trusted upon you.

Interviewer: What do you do with the hate SMS? Do you reply?

Respondent: Yeah, we do. We love it. In SMS, out of 100 nice SMS, if it's just one, it's like wow that's the thing because we actually made someone think. Then we'll enforce the SMS thing that okay we got this very strange reaction in the radio program saying this is stupid, but why is it stupid, how many people think it's stupid? We saw a streamlining of chat messages and we reply to the hate message, and then they'll send you "I love you's". For me, I would love to read one hate message because that is something that actually triggered someone, it poked someone, and then you reinforce that, and that is what behavioral change communication is. (Gender expert, Kathmandu, 2015)

In this context, gender expertise is used to spark debates, make people wonder and challenge gender stereotypes, for example regarding masculinity, in order to transform attitudes and behaviour. Performing the role of the "queered gender advisor", asks questions, challenges and disrupts norms regarding gender and sexuality, and proposes forms of thinking and doing gender other-wise. There is also an interesting performative element to this example in the ways in which gender is being performed through real and imagined characters on the radio. On the one hand, he makes references to the ways in which he challenges and performs other-wise in his personal life. On the other hand, he uses imaginary characters and drama to prompt thinking differently about gender. In this sense, expertise is not about telling people what to do, but about prompting debate between the programme speakers and the listeners and among the listeners themselves. Expert knowledge then is not a controlling and imposing form of knowledge, but practiced as way to disrupt and open space for debate, which is deeply political. In this space, it becomes possible to bring about microtransformations through the numerous and varied reactions by the audience, as illustrated by the hate SMS that transform into "I love you's". This example also shows that less conventional forms of gender mainstreaming activities might provide interesting spaces for politics and transform our understandings of gender expertise.

The second vignette is from an interview with a woman from West Africa who has worked as a 'gender expert' for several years in various contexts, mostly in the field of security. During our conversation, she shared her thoughts about what gender expertise might be, and her transformative trajectory of working on gender mainstreaming:

For me the way we do gender mainstreaming is completely wrong. ... We approach it as if we have the answers to the needs of women in the security sector, it's just about providing training and trying to advocate for gender equality, but we don't engage women in the security sector as if they were partners in the struggle. That is a huge fundamental gap and I'm also part of this problem because of my work ... it's now, I sit back and think about it, I say hey, it's not enough to just go to a security sector institution and treat the women in that sector as you would treat the men in that sector, you should actually engage the women in the sector as allies, as people who share a common struggle, who share a common goal, but that is not what we do. ... I don't think I have the answers to how that can be done ... I think what we need to put on the table is that this is about humanity and that is where I think that we need to completely change our approach. ... I have moved away from calling myself a gender expert. ... I will ponder a little bit more about your question whether there is gender expertise ... and I am more and more convinced that no there is not. You know you can have the general idea and principle of what works and what should be the ideal for women and men, in terms of the question of gender mainstreaming, gender equality and all of that, but we cannot have expertise that is ideal and appropriate for every given context. We need to see ourselves as not necessarily gender experts but perhaps facilitating of a discussion or a subject. (Gender expert from West Africa, 2013)

Through her self-reflexive account, she engages in a critical evaluation of her own work as a 'gender expert', as well as reflecting on gender mainstreaming activities more generally. She challenges gender mainstreaming practice for excluding certain groups of women rather than working together with them as partners, and for imposing expert ideas rather than opening up space for debate. She asks fundamental questions about the why, how and who of gender mainstreaming: which methods should be used, who should be involved in bringing about gender transformation, and what are the ultimate aims and what are the problematic implications of certain gender mainstreaming activities. She thus uses her experience of working as a 'gender expert' as a space for contesting and renegotiating what gender expertise might be about and how we could go about achieving gender transformations in different ways.

This expert is acutely aware of her own involvement in some of the problematic ways and effects of gender mainstreaming. She also shows how her experience and self-reflection has pushed her to change her views and activities. No longer calling herself a 'gender expert', she proposes a move towards conceptualising the role of 'gender experts' in terms of facilitators of debate around gender transformations. This raises very fundamental

questions about expertise. In many ways, she embodies the figure of the 'queered gender expert' through questioning gender expertise knowledge and practice, pushing the boundaries of gender expert activity, transforming the contexts in which she works, and advocating for more 'humane' gender transformation activities. In the end, admitting that she does not have all the answers, she advocates for a much more humble understanding of the role that 'gender experts' could play in facilitating dialogue. Moreover, her proposal to move away in her work from a narrow focus on gender (and women) towards a broader focus on 'humanity' is a radical proposal.

Thus, instead of 'knowing gender' in a controlling and normalising way, she interrupts processes of knowing, subverts the normalised understandings of gender and suggests forms of knowing and practicing gender expertise otherwise. This allows for other voices – sometimes marginalised and silenced such as with the case of the women security sector personnel in her example – to be heard and to participate in the debate on gender issues. This understanding of gender expert practice creates space for multiple forms of authoritative knowledge on gender, challenging the sole authority of gender expert knowledge. It moves us away from seeking to recover a single and 'pure' feminist agenda (i.e. that supposedly existed prior to depoliticisation) and to instead allow for multiple feminist agendas. Finally, her experience also illustrates the politics of self-transformation through gender expertise practice.

Self-transformation and unexpected consequences are also at the heart of the third vignette from a Liberian gender expert working in mainstreaming gender into the security sector institutions.

At the time, I noticed, I was doing everything. I would come from work, at 4 o'clock, I would cook, clean up, wash, and my husband was just watching movies. So I started arguing with him in the house. I said, "No, you didn't marry me to be your slave. I'm your partner. You should help me, we should share the work in the house." ... And he had a serious problem with it. ... He said, "Oh, that gender office is poisoning your head." Well, after some years, he started to understand, now things are fine, he changed. (Liberian Gender expert, Monrovia, 2013)

This vignette illustrates the microtransformations and unexpected consequences that happen through gender expertise: transformations in the home, in everyday life, very personal transformations. Working as a gender expert motivated this woman to discuss and challenge gendered divisions of labour in her household and to push her husband to confront his assumptions and prejudices and to transform his attitude and behaviour. Her colleagues working in the same institution also reported similar experiences that sometimes transformed the gendered divisions of labour within the whole extended family. Gender experts working in other institutions and contexts also reported similar transformations of their personal and family lives. It thus created an incentive for debating and contesting gender discrimination in the personal realm, recalling the age-old feminist insight of the personal being political. This is an interesting story because the institution for which this gender expert is working has been continuously critiqued for unsuccessful

gender mainstreaming. Hence, in this case, involvement in gender expertise work did not necessarily bring about the expected changes within the institution it is meant to transform, but did transform gender relations and hierarchies in the personal and household spaces of the experts.

These vignettes show that gender experts can use or actively create political spaces in their activities. A last vignette of the multiple politics of gender expertise I would like to mention here is my own research and the collaborative research project within which this is situated. As has been noted by feminist and participatory action researchers, interview settings and research projects are a site of politics. For example, during my conversations with gender experts, there were many moments of questioning what gender expert knowledge and practice is about and my conversation partners often used the interview as a space for reflecting critically about their activities and assumptions, and were grateful for that space. The conferences and workshops that we organised in the context of this collaborative research project also provided spaces of interaction between gender experts, academics and practitioners working on gender issues. This is also a contribution to highlighting and expanding the political spaces that academics can create and mobilise through their research. This can encourage us to continue reflecting on how these debates contribute to our understanding of the political and politics more broadly, and the possibilities for multiple understandings of the political.

V. Conclusion

Moving beyond a depoliticisation framing, this chapter has analysed the multiple politics of gender expertise, as understood and practiced by 'gender experts'. The analysis shows that in order to take seriously the multiple politics of gender expertise, we need to move beyond the technical-political dichotomy; consider the fragile and contingent character of gender expertise; adopt a broad understanding of the political and recall the age-old feminist insight that the personal is political; pay attention to microtransformations; and remain open to unexpected consequences. The experiences of gender experts documented in their own writings and in my interviews show how they implicitly or explicitly enact the "dual politics of possibilities" to acknowledge their involvement and complicity in certain problematic practices associated with their profession, but also to identify space for transformation and dialogue. These experiences also demonstrate that there are multiple sites of politics and the political can take various meanings and forms in their work. Through performing the 'queered gender advisor', gender expert work can question and disrupt existing gender relations, facilitate debate and open space for marginalised voices and forms of knowledge to participate in the debate. Thus, instead of 'knowing gender' in a controlling and normalising way, processes of knowing can be disrupted and normalised understandings of gender can be subverted, and forms of knowing and practicing gender expertise other-wise can be heard. This understanding of gender expert practice creates space for multiple forms of authoritative knowledge on gender, challenging the sole authority of gender expert knowledge. This moves us away from attempts to

recover a single and 'pure' feminist agenda (i.e. that existed prior to depoliticisation), which could contribute to further entrench existing hierarchies among different forms of knowledge on gender issues. Instead, it provides space for multiple feminist agendas and for self-transformation.

Once we take seriously the politics of gender expertise and the political spaces that allow us to consider forms of knowing gender other-wise, we can engage with these on their own terms. This requires detailed and context-specific investigations with particular forms of knowing and practicing gender. What do they tell us about gender and social change? The following questions from a decolonial feminist project can become our guideline for such an endeavour: "How do we learn about each other? How do we do it without harming each other but with the courage to take up a weaving of the everyday that may reveal deep betrayals? How do we cross without taking over? With whom do we do this work?" (Lugones 2010, 755).

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