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Russia: Interview with the Feminist Anti-War Resistance (FAR).

Wednesday 14 June 2023, by [KISELEVA Roksana](#), [WOYZECK João](#) (Date first published: 8 June 2023).

The Feminist Anti-War Resistance (FAR) group was founded in February 2022 as an association of Russian feminists to coordinate protests against the Russian invasion of Ukraine. FAR gained widespread attention when it published a manifesto calling for global solidarity against Russia's war of aggression, and when activists laid chrysanthemums and tulips with blue and yellow ribbons at monuments to the Great Patriotic War (World War II) in 94 Russian and foreign cities on 8 March 2022. On 23 December 2022, the Russian Ministry of Justice put the organisation on its list of "foreign agents". Roksana Kiseleva is a member of the FAR and currently lives in exile in Georgia. The Movement for Socialism conducted a written interview with her.

Interview with Roksana Kiseleva by João Woyzeck (FSO Zurich); from Antikap

João Woyzeck (BFS Zurich): You are a member of the editorial board of Zhenskaya Pravda, the newspaper of the FAR. Can you tell us something about the magazine?

Roksana: Our aim is to reach an audience in Russia that is not addressed by most anti-war media: Women over 50 who are not necessarily pro-opposition but not pro-war either - our mothers, grandmothers and aunts. They understand that bad things are happening all around them, but they don't want to read or talk about it because they are emotionally drained - by their work, by their responsibilities, by life itself. Based on research that sociologists have done for us, we can see that our target audience is war-weary. That's why we focus on the social and economic impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in Russia: electricity bills are rising, child labour is being used to provide clothes and other things for the troops, and the government has completely taken control of social media.

On child labour in Russia

In March, the Duma Committee on Labour, Social Policy and Veterans' Affairs passed the draft law on youth unemployment and recommended it for adoption in the first reading. The Duma is thus expected to pass the bill, which would simplify the employment of young people aged 14 and over: they would only need the consent of one parent and no longer that of the guardianship and custody authorities. [1]

The bill is also co-authored by Andrei Isayev, deputy leader of the United Russia faction in the Duma. Isayev pointed out that the "anti-Russian" economic sanctions imposed by the Western community of states would require a simplification of child labour in order to support the income of certain households. [2] Nikolai Arefiev, who represents the KPRF in the Duma, however, doubts this. After all, he says, there are enough adult unemployed people. [3]

You are currently living in Georgia. How did this situation come about? Will your activist activities continue?

I had to leave Russia last autumn to avoid prosecution. Now I have more resources for my activist work because I don't have to hide and live in constant fear of the police. I work on our newspaper and other projects for the FAR. I have met many wonderful, smart and friendly people from other anti-war organisations and movements. This also makes me more confident for the future.

What is the importance of feminism in Russian civil society? What issues or political goals are particularly central to feminism in Russia?

The two central issues are domestic violence and abortion. Domestic violence was effectively decriminalised a few years ago and now the war has made the situation worse for women.

Abortions themselves are still not banned, but there are reports that doctors in public hospitals are being pressured not to perform abortions. For example, they send the women to priests or demand the father's consent beforehand. The government also spends billions of roubles on information campaigns critical of abortion. The government wants to increase birth rates, although now is probably the worst possible time to have a child.

Abortions under Putin

The Russian state, together with the Orthodox Church, is pursuing a campaign against self-determination in reproductive rights. Since 2011, for example, Russian hospitals have introduced so-called "silence weeks", whereby appointments are postponed by a week or more if a woman applies for an abortion. However, the delay causes the pregnancy to progress and other types of abortion (up to and including surgery) have to be used, which can seriously endanger the health of affected women. In 2013, Putin also banned advertising for abortions. And since 2016, women seeking an abortion have had to view an image of the embryo and its heartbeat during an ultrasound scan. In addition, the Russian state promotes the initiative of hospitals to send women to psychologists before an abortion or to hand out special questionnaires to the women in which the women are asked accusatory and insulting questions. Many hospitals even deliberately distribute illegible and manipulative brochures with misleading information about abortion and its consequences. In some regions of Russia, health workers are trained to include "traditional values" in pre-abortion counselling. During counselling sessions, women are asked to fill in questionnaires with questions such as: "Are you ready for a posthumous encounter with the soul of your child?".

The Orthodox Church works closely with the reactionary Russian state in this context. Patriarch Kirill I, meanwhile, proposed a ban on abortions in private clinics in a speech to the Federation Council. And the Russian Orthodox Church proposed requiring married women to obtain their husband's consent to abortions.

The Duma, Russia's parliament, proposed a ban on online sales of medical abortifacients in August 2022. Hospitals and pharmacies have also had problems with the availability of the pill since March 2023. In summer 2022, the Duma also announced a particularly devastating bill banning abortions under compulsory health insurance. And Tatyana Golikova, the deputy prime minister for education, health and social policy, proposed a ban on abortions without parental consent before the age of 18.

Meanwhile, a bill was reintroduced in the Duma to ban the dissemination of information about "voluntarily refraining from giving birth to a child" among minors. In September 2022, it had been rejected for revision due to formal weaknesses. [4]

Since the start of the Kremlin regime's war of aggression against Ukraine, repressive laws have intensified dramatically. How has activism changed since the summer of 2022?

Since the beginning of the war, the Russian government has enacted a number of repressive laws and more are still being added. Certain margins that used to exist have now closed. Although the political situation deteriorated earlier, we still had some kind of freedom. For example, in 2020 I founded a fem-dacha with my friends, a kind of feminist retreat from the pressure of the Putin regime. We wanted to support activists in Russia by offering them free, comprehensive services and psychological help. This has become impossible now.

People are afraid of going to jail and are therefore less willing to take part in direct action. That is understandable. But street protests are not the only form of resistance. People adapt. They protest in secret. They can do small things, like bringing flowers to Ukrainian monuments in Russia. Our movement is open to anyone who wants to join it - people can send us pictures of their small protests and we post them on our social media accounts. Our main goal is to unite and fight together against the Kremlin.

Civil disobedience is also a form of resistance. This can be, for example, not allowing the government to mobilise your employees or not teaching your students state propaganda when you are told to do so as a teacher.

Security is the biggest issue for us now, we are very careful. We don't let anyone we can't vet into our chat groups and sensitive information. We use encrypted messages to communicate with people who are still in Russia. We also publish security guides on our social media.

Some left-wing but also liberal observers call the Kremlin regime fascist or post-fascist. This is controversial and is not shared without exception. How do you see it?

Do you know Godwin's Law? It says that you lose an argument as soon as you compare someone to Hitler. The inventor of this law eventually broke it himself - in relation to Putin. [\[5\]](#) The Russian authorities do not recognise the existence of Ukraine as an independent state. For propaganda purposes they use the nationalist idea of Pan-Slavism and Russian domination. This already seems fascist to me personally.

The domestic backlash is more than a conservative revival. It is not just about trying to lure people with traditional values. The Kremlin is threatening people with the idea of a "collective West that has not yet been able to destroy Russia" but continues to do so. The LGBTQ community, childless people and feminists are turned into enemy images. The government wants the population to be afraid of democracy and believes that total censorship is its salvation.

In terms of networking, our members participate in anti-war events to share knowledge and experiences with other activists. We have met many of them, and personal bonds have been formed.

What role could a feminist perspective play in overcoming Putin's war of aggression? And what role does the FAR play within the various opposition groups in Russia?

First of all, we are still a grassroots initiative. We come from civil resistance, not from big politics. Big groups need to listen to the small ones and value their unique experiences, which are useful and necessary.

Meanwhile, we also play a role in the opposition. But not so long ago, the situation was different. Big opposition groups like Navalny's team, had a very male-centric outlook and male leaders. That is changing now, because the only way to win is to unite.

As a feminist movement we work for mothers, students, working class women, queer women and ethnic minority women. We focus on their needs and concerns. We want their voices to be heard now, and we don't want women's issues to be abandoned once Putin's regime is gone.

On 3 April, Oleg Matveyev, a State Duma deputy from Putin's de facto United Russia party, said on state television that he had drafted a bill to declare feminism "extremism". Matveyev justified this by saying that for him feminist activists were foreign agents undermining Russian interests.

How has the situation developed since then, especially for feminism?

Feminism will not be banned as an ideology. Rather, the state action is tending in a different direction. In December 2022, our Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin announced a different national strategy, which he said would protect women's rights at work, on the streets and at home. It is to be launched this year. According to this, the regime would not mind that (such a kind of) feminism exists. Rather, the regime wants to bring it under control. The regime wants pro-government, obedient feminists who disseminate the statements approved by the government. But this would mean capitulating to political repression and allowing their men to be sent to war.

You brought up the idea of Russian domination. The FAR has supported and shared the "[Manifesto of Ethnic Minorities](#)". What is this about?

Our project is about supporting regional initiatives of ethnic minorities within the Russian state - [FreeBuryatia Foundation](#), [FreeKalmykia](#), [Novaya Tuva](#) and others. Each experience is unique. Ethnic minority women must be heard!

Since the invasion of Ukraine, there has been increased talk of Russian imperialism. On the other hand, little or no attention is paid to the colonial conditions within the Russian multi-ethnic state [Russian citizenship as distinct from Russian ethnicity; editor's note]. But it is also necessary to reflect on our internal imperialism, which we have learned through our life in Russia as part of the so-called ethnic majority. We have no idea how privileged we actually are. Moreover, these same imperialist views also lead people to support the war against Ukraine.

How does the worldwide networking of feminist forces work to stand together against the Kremlin regime's war of aggression?

There are FAR sections all over the world, from Korea to Brazil. Anyone can join us. Our international groups take part in local actions and demonstrations in their respective countries, communicate with the press in their countries and organise fundraising events to support Ukrainian refugees.

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P.S.

<https://sozialismus.ch/international/2023/russland-interview-mit-dem-feministischen-antikriegswiderstand-far/>

Footnotes

[1] ГОСУДАРСТВЕННАЯ ДУМА (2023): Комитет по труду, социальной политике и делам ветеранов поддержал законопроект об упрощении трудоустройства подростков, abrufbar auf: <http://duma.gov.ru/news/56689/> (04.04.2023).

[2] LENTA·RU (2023): В России упростят трудоустройство четырнадцатилетних, abrufbar auf: <https://iz.ru/1453655/natalia-bashlykova/iunost-ne-porok-v-rossii-uprostit-trudoustroistvo-s-14-let> (04.04.2023).

[3] Известия (2023): Юность — не порок: в России упростят трудоустройство с 14 лет, abrufbar auf: <https://lenta.ru/news/2023/01/13/prosto/> (04.04.2023).

[4] FAR (2023): ПЕТИЦИЯ ЗА ПРАВО НА АБОРТ, abrufbar unter: https://www.change.org/p/петиция-за-право-на-аборт?utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=custom_url&recruited_by_id=32b33370-6db0-11ed-901b-138fd7dfefd7 (03.04.2023); Zur Auffassung von der Darstellung freiwilliger Kinderlosigkeit in kreml-nahen Medien als kindsfeindlicher Propaganda vgl. auch риа новости (2023): В Госдуму внесли проект о запрете пропаганды чайлдфри среди детей, abrufbar unter: <https://ria.ru/20230227/chayldfri-1854649228.html> (03.04.2023).

[5] Godwin merkte ironisch-zynisch an, dass Putin im Rahmen der russischen Invasion der Ukraine durchaus gewisse Analogien zu Hitler aufweise. In: Godwin, M. [@sfnemonic], abrufbar auf: <https://twitter.com/sfnemonic/status/1504244193660571651?lang=de> (03.04.2023).