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War in Ukraine

# A Tremendous Resistance: Feminists in Russia against the War and Patriarchy

- Features - Feminism -

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**We publish an interview with Sasha from the Feminist Anti-War Movement in Russia who has been taking part in the Permanent Assembly Against the War. She tells about how this war is the continuation of patriarchal violence women have been fighting against, about the different forms of opposition to the war in Russia and announces that actions will take place in Russia as well for the [transnational May 1st against the war](#).**

### **TSS Platform: How are you organizing as Feminist Anti-war Movement in Russia?**

SASHA: The Feminist anti-war resistance started on the second day of the war, on the 25th of February. Our first gesture was [a manifesto](#) that was originally written in Russian but later translated in more than 20 languages. Through this manifesto we started mobilizing women and feminist groups around our resistance. The main channel for our actions and organization is Telegram. Already during the first days there were 10.000 subscribers in the Telegram channel, also thanks to the support of some feminists and influencers. That's how we started growing. On March 6th we took part as a feminist block in a big anti-war street protest. This street protest was not very successful, because the Russian police was well-organized and blocked the major squares and streets, so even if there were large groups of people, they were not able to unite with other groups and this was quite devastating. After the 6th of March we decided to change our strategy and move to less visible tactics of everyday resistance. These are safer, have less exposure to police violence but still can give signs of anti-war resistance in the cities. We want to create an anti-war "second city" within the city or the villages.

### **Is your movement widespread throughout Russia?**

Yes, now we have 30.000 subscribers in our Telegram channel. Among them there are several thousand activists from different cities and villages, who constantly send us reports, ideas, suggestions for new actions, etc. The scope of the actions is variegated: it can be anything from stickers to performances. Our vision of our movement is that we don't have very organized and clear structures, and instead we suggest people to organize their own affinity group, they can organize their own chat groups, Facebook page, Telegram channel, whatever they want. They can use the symbol of the Feminist anti-war resistance if they want and they associate themselves with us. They can tell us through the channel, but we normally don't even publish the information if the group is based in Russia and is not a public in social media (which happens rarely) because it is not safe. We feel freer in publishing information about groups abroad. We have a number of groups abroad, in the UK, in Czech Republic, in Germany, but within Russia we try to guard their anonymity and their "invisibility" in a sense. The idea is that there are these different affinity groups all over the country and our channel is a platform for the circulation of ideas about resistance and a way to coordinate jointly. We are preparing new instructions on how to start your own affinity group. We have many people asking: "how can I join? Do you know any people from this town or that city?" We are not organizing them; they should get organized themselves.

### **Why do you think that feminists are at the forefront of the anti-war movement in Russia and elsewhere?**

The first reason has to do with the Russian context. The feminist movement was not seen as a political movement and was not repressed as other political movements. Feminists were not taken seriously by the government. If you look at the political landscape you can see that many other political groups were repressed long ago, like anarchists, Navalny's supporters, etc. We, feminists, were seen by the state as some strange girls doing some performances or organizing lectures and festivals. Maybe, they thought that Pussy Riot was enough. I mean, there are repressions against feminists — there is the case of Yulia Tsvetkova [who faces imprisonment for her drawings](#), we were

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harassed by the police number of times, but probably the feminist movement was not so much a target. Before we organized the anti-war resistance, the feminist movement was not very structured. There were feminist groups across the country who were barely collaborating with each other. There was not such a united movement, even though there were lots of people involved through different groups. The point of this Feminist anti-war resistance is also to take the autonomy of these feminist groups across the country as our strength. Because it is now more difficult to figure out who is acting.

The second reason for it is the pretty obvious resistance of feminists against militarism and any type of violence. For those of us who were fighting in Russia for the law against domestic violence and for the rights of survivors to sexual violence and harassment it is simply obvious that this war and this violence are the continuation of the domestic violence that we have been witnessing and we have been fighting against. First of all, the war has been ongoing for eight years, even though with totally different dynamics. More importantly, the war is not some discrete event that has an end and a beginning: the war is just the culmination or climax of the patriarchal violence we are living in. For us as feminists it is obvious that this war is part of the violence we have been fighting against and will keep fighting.

**The bodies of women are exposed to the violence of the conquest, but there is also a symbolic take in this war, in the fact that Putin is punishing Ukraine for wanting to be free, as a father or a husband would punish a daughter or a wife wanting to be free.**

I totally agree. He has been developing this persona of head of the family, of a patriarch and this got intensified with this war. The most cynical gesture of him is that he honored soldiers who were in Bucha. What does it mean? It means: “yes, we did it and we are proud of what we have done there”. That definitely makes this logic of punishment even more explicit: punishment through rape and torture and very cruel violence over people who are absolutely innocent — cleansing, as Russian propagandists call it — and over everyone who happen to become freer than Putin wants them to become. He uses this style of behavior even in politics.

**Also the women who are fleeing the war, once they cross the borders of Ukraine, encounter patriarchal violence, under the form of restrictions of freedom of abortion, harassments and the like. Do you have connections with other feminists abroad?**

The war highlights the patriarchy we live in from all the sides. There are informal support structures for Ukrainian women who need to get an abortion, even when abroad, in Poland but also in other countries where getting an abortion without a permanent residence permit or health insurance is not that easy as well. Besides abortion they are also faced with the danger of trafficking; we are working on this too. We are trying to cooperate with different organizations if needed, to provide materials in Ukrainian and in Russian to help avoid trafficking and sexual exploitation. Many NGOs are simply not aware of the issues. We collaborate with organizations in Poland and Belarus to circulate information.

**Getting back to the situation in Russia, what other protests against the war are taking place there?**

There are very different types of protests. Some professional groups that never issued any political statement before became active when the war started. There were many petitions from different professional groups: animators, film directors, journalists, teachers, architects, scientists, IT workers, musicians, etc. It was an impressive and promising moment when many people realized that they need to cooperate and find some ground for collective action, and they found this possibility in their professional identity. Unfortunately, with the rise of censorship these initiatives stopped being visible. After all these groups disappeared, the Confederation of Labor of Russia (KTR) remained active. The trade union “Teacher” issued [a petition](#) that was signed by thousands of teachers. This is a unique moment in Russian recent history because teachers as a group are very vulnerable regarding their job security as the majority of schools are state owned. Another very active group is students: they are running [numerous initiatives](#) and tried to

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support the initiatives of other workers. For example, yesterday (April 19th, Ed.) there was a taxi drivers' strike and students called to support this strike. They wrote an appeal to university teachers to call them to take a stand against the war. They supported an anti-war sick leave group we are also cooperating with. So, there is a tight net of different anti-war initiatives who work together and represent different political tactics as well.

### **How are the economic sanctions impacting people in Russia now?**

Several thousand people are already on downtime, especially those from the car industry because components are lacking. Many companies closed, and in Moscow only in the upcoming months there will be more 200.000 unemployed, according to the mayor. My mom works at school, and she follows all the updates about paper and paper is in a huge deficit right now, because it is produced with materials imported from Finland. They are discussing whether they should cancel state exams because of the lack of paper. We have problems with publishing houses as well. It happened also before the war, because the government launched a whole project of rewriting the textbooks, and they occupied all the printing houses and used all the paper to print dozens of millions of copies of school manuals. I am curious whether they will be able to finish printing these textbooks. Additionally, inflation is growing. According to different data, prices for basic supplies, like potatoes, carrots, cabbage and onions, grew from 40 to 60% in these few months. We were already in economic crisis before the war entered its new phase, and now the consequences are even more devastating.

### **You are part of the Permanent Assembly Against the War, pushing forward a transnational politics of peace. Why do you think a transnational coordination against this war is important?**

Our ultimate goal is to fight imperialism and capitalism, and this cannot be done within national borders, this would be reckless. It would be reckless to build something new within national borders. This transnational cooperation is essential, and it is also essential to exchange tactics of resistance and different strategies. I hope that these joint actions can bring a powerful message for Russian activists and people in Russia: that there are people who are critical of the West too and were always critical of NATO, but now they too see that Russian imperialism is a more pressing issue than NATO.

### **On the 1st of May the Permanent Assembly Against the War has called for a coordinated day of action, to “strike the war” and show our transnational connections against the war. How are you planning to join and support the day of action?**

We will for sure join the transnational strike against the war — we are still discussing the format of possible gathering and action: we might try to occupy streets and squares by feeding pigeons or subvert the official celebration.

Source [Transnational Strike](#).

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