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FAS (#voices_ukkrain_ok)-The problem of feminist international politics. A view from Ukraine

Monday 16 May 2022, by [RFO ONA](#) (Date first published: 9 May 2022).

What do Ukrainian women themselves think about helping them? What kind of support do they want to see in the first place? And what do they find problematic about the international movement in support of Ukraine?

The other day Tamara Zlobina, philosopher and feminist from Lviv and editor in chief of Gender in Detail, wrote an important post about this. She criticized the position of Western feminists on supporting Ukraine with weapons - and condemned such “support” for Ukraine that does not include the voices of Ukrainian women themselves. Yasya Mikhaïlova, an activist from Kiev, translated the text into Russian for the feminist project RFO Ona. We recommend it to you.

In two months of war I have seen four appeals from Western feminists not to give Ukraine weapons. There were Italian, German and Hispanic feminists, joined by North American feminists. For the sake of balance, I will say that the Feminist Anti-War Resistance is one of the few who are still trying to stand up to the darkness of the “over the fence” in a coordinated way and feminists from Central and Eastern Europe are just as fucked up as we are.

All these calls were: “We are against war! War is bad. It is a man’s game! We demand peace! We are against giving weapons to Ukraine, because weapons will only inflame the conflict even more. Stop the war immediately. None of the “sisters” thought to consult with Ukrainian feminists when writing these calls (and where Ukrainians accidentally read them before publication and criticised them, their voices were simply ignored).

One gets the impression from the open letters that all these highly respected professors with lifelong positions at prestigious universities closed their eyes and wished for a pink unicorn to appear. And now in all seriousness they expect it to appear. But pink unicorns do not exist. Neither do wars as “men’s games” or “consequences of patriarchy”, which do not involve women at all.

Western anti-militarist theory posits wars as something like two villains fighting over resources. Well, for example, the bad capitalist and imperialist US is fighting the bad dictator Saddam Hussein for oil in Iraq. So we need to demand that both sides disarm and put women at the negotiating table who, because of their gender role, will worry about the future of children, not the macho pride that can’t lose. A feminist foreign policy is therefore to advocate disarmament, strengthen women and encourage them to engage in ‘peacemaking’ (this vague phrase translates as ‘to be leaders in all spheres and actively participate in decision-making at different levels’).

This is [originally] a “Facebook” post, so it’s OK to swear. I am increasingly fucking amazed at how

stupid some established intellectuals are, how incapable they are of seeing the premise of their own judgement. I used to get the impression on Western programmes that some of them were talking nonsense - but I thought it was probably me who hadn't read enough books and didn't understand something. Such highly regarded people can't be wrong! I now know that with my critical thinking it was very OK at times like this.

Despite all the tons of academic junk that has been written over the last 50 years - about "stamping out" your privilege, about the need to analyse exactly what position you speak from, about how perhaps certain power imbalances are invisible from your position, about listening to the discriminated, blah blah blah - the authors and authors of Western anti-militarism have overlooked the obvious. The fucking obvious. That they are all from imperialist countries that have centuries of colonialist history. And the wars they theorize about are those wars their states have fought on the territory of other countries. Or those that have taken place in contexts other than theirs in which they have very little understanding.

None of the countries in Western Europe or North America where this anti-militarist discourse has been created for the last 30-40 years have had wars or revolutions for 70 years. Not a single feminist professor, not a single Western intellectual has been in a situation where his/her life has been threatened because of fighting against a dictatorial regime. Or because his/her country has been decided to be occupied by an aggressive neighbour, to kill all dissenters and take some of those who survive to rebuild new cities somewhere in the desert. This is one of the two blind spots that have turned some Western intellectuals/k into dumb asses.

They have completely missed the phenomenon of wars of liberation. For example, the struggle of the people against the dictatorship, as in Syria. The struggle against occupation by another state, as we have [in Ukraine] now. The struggle to establish their own state, like the Kurds. This is why peacebuilding initiatives and feminist foreign policy advocates are now quiet. Because in their conceptual framework there is no liberation war in which one side is right. There are only two patriarchal scoundrels fighting each other while women and children suffer. Therefore one cannot support one side with weapons. A situation in which more guns to the injured side = less casualties, they have not yet encountered. More precisely, they have faced it, but they have turned a wide blind eye.

Their conceptual blindness has been multiplied by propaganda narratives along the lines of "not everything is so unambiguous", beneficial to both the aggressors and the economic elites of Western countries. Well, because how else could France and Germany continue to sell arms to Russia after 2012 and get hooked on Russian gas? That is why this version of anti-militarism was eagerly supported by corporations and politicians - such a convenient and noble pretext for business as usual.

Despite all the above, in our case it is obvious that Russian aggression is criminal. It couldn't be more obvious. Therefore, one blind spot is not enough to generate a wave of "don't give Ukraine weapons, we are for peace!" letters. The second blind spot is the misunderstanding of the war. They think the war will end in peace. As they see it, it ends like this: there was news on TV about the war in country X (some distant and uncivilized country) and then they stopped showing horrible pictures. And the news about that country disappeared altogether, because there was "peace" there.

When you live through a war on television, it's very easy to think that "war has no winners". But in reality, a war always ends in victory, overt and covert. Only after one side has won and the other defeated will peace prevail. And which of the parties to the conflict wins the war, very much depends on the content of the peace. For example, Ichkeria won the first Chechen war, and began to establish itself as an independent state. It lost the second war, and was wiped off the face of the

Earth. In both cases “times of peace” came in the end. The difference between the two is enormous.

All these Western “peacemaking” initiatives in the midst of the conflict are basically: we don’t care who will be the winner and who will be the loser in your conflict. Just sit down at the table and start making peace. We don’t care who raped and who was raped. Just make peace, conflict is bad.

Ukrainians, accept peace on any terms! Don’t you understand that the longer the war lasts, the more people die? We don’t care that Russia is setting up concentration camps, taking people to Siberia en masse, kidnapping activists in the occupied territories, that Russian soldiers are robbing, raping and abusing people for fun. That in Russian-controlled “peaceful” Ukraine all this will continue on an even larger scale. No way, it can’t be! We have never seen anything like this in our lives. And the news about other wars did not show anything like that. There were guys in suits signing an agreement, and then the news about this country stopped. That means it was OK from there on out!

To all the feminists who have signed open letters urging not to give Ukraine weapons I advise you to imagine what the world would be like if World War II had ended with the victory of Nazi Germany instead of its defeat. There would also have been peace. And much faster, if the countries had not fought back! Great-grandparents would not have died, because they would not have taken part in the resistance movement. Well, yes, all the Jews would have been exterminated, but the French or Belgian women would not have been threatened. They would have continued to live and raise their children - simply in German. Somewhere near Magadan, where the French population would have been deported to work in the mines. Well, not Aryans to mine ore, would they?

The aforementioned open letters from feminists anger me, but do not surprise me. A typical example of how people rely on ideological templates instead of thinking with their heads and reacting in innovative ways to the challenges of reality. It’s easier, more convenient, requires less energy - and leads to shame.

As a feminist I say #ArmUkraineNow. And then I will develop a feminist international policy designed for reality, not pink unicorn fantasies. One that recognises problems and threats, is sensitive to liberation wars and encourages governments to provide immediate assistance to those who defend themselves, to those who fight for freedom. Join in!

Tamara Zlobina philosopher and feminist from Lviv and editor in chief of Gender in Detail,

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P.S.

РФО «ОНА»

<https://ona.org.ru/post/683798572722012161/arm-ukraine-now>

Yasya Mikhailova, an activist from Kiev, translated the text into Russian for the feminist project RFO Ona.

Перевод: Проблема феминистской международной политики. Взгляд из Украины.

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