

Bilkis



A Ukrainian feminist group

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Bilkis, feminism in wartime

The members of the feminist group Bilkis from Lviv like to ride bicycles and when the military situation and the weather allow it, they organise rides. Bilkis was founded 3 years ago in Kharkiv, then with the war moved to Lviv. Since 24 February: «Bilkis has changed its range of activities to meet the needs of the Ukrainian population. The main thing for Ukrainians who lost everything was to provide them with shelter, food and medicine», explain the feminists. During the first four months of the war «we sent parcels to the east and centre of Ukraine. Most often it was to Dnipro and Kropyvnytsky, because that is where many people from the Donetsk and Luhansk regions were evacuated,» explain its members. Today in Lviv, they have opened a «salon of things», «a space where you can leave things and - where you can certainly take them». The opening hours of this space, which aims to be «a real alternative to existing market relations and is based on mutual help, cooperation», are announced on social networks. Clothes, toys etc. are freely available to those who need them. But Bilkis does not forget its feminist identity. In December 2022, she organised a campaign against the liquor brand Cerise ivre, which displays a naked woman on its bottles. Activists posted themselves in front of the brand's shop in Lviv, holding signs that read «Stop sexualising women», «The female body is not an advertisement», «Boycott the sexists». The Ukrainian fascist group Katarsis threatened them with an unbearable campaign, and its activists posted themselves in front of them at the entrance to the shop. Only the presence of the police prevented them from attacking the activists. Later, a town councillor denounced them as «communist» supporters. Undaunted, after a harrowing weekend, passers-by were able to see the Bilkis activists putting up their posters on sexual consent in the streets of Lviv. Bilkis, what kind of name is that? «We thought for a long time about choosing a name and decided to use the name of Bilkis - the Queen of Sheba, described in Muslim mythology as the goddess of love and of all the poor, a half-demon, a witch.»



Feminist words

Interview with Bilkis

First of all, let's talk about the situation before 24 February. Can you tell us how Bilkis was formed? You present yourself as a "trans-inclusive intersectional activist group with an anti-capitalist agenda". How do you articulate these political and social dimensions?

Bilkis was established 2.5 years ago by two of our members in Kharkiv. The activity started with holding conferences, organising street demonstrations for the international action of 16 Days of Active Action against Gender-based Violence, writing texts on the topics of gender-based violence, women's and queer people's rights, the concept of consent and many other topics, publishing stories of women and queer people who suffered from gender-based violence and shared their stories, in order to make visible a topic often silenced. A year ago we expanded our group and other participants joined us, with whom we also organised actions up to 16 days of active actions against gender-based violence: holding rallies and street interventions

with posters, distributing leaflets, publishing personal stories that women and queer people who survived violence also agreed to share.

In February, we planned to organise a two-day intensive course for teenage girls with lectures and interactions on 5 and 6 March. With this event, we wanted to build communication and strengthen solidarity between the girls. But unfortunately, due to the aggression of Russia, this event did not take place. Similarly, the release of a small newspaper on eating disorders, which we had also prepared in winter and planned to release in spring, could not be realised.

Due to the violent hostilities in Eastern Ukraine, our members have moved to Lviv and we are currently preparing many new and interesting projects, while providing humanitarian aid to those in need.

More specifically, on the issue of transphobia and homophobia in Ukraine, can you tell us what the situation is in Ukraine and what your activities are on these issues?

The situation is a bit polar. On the one hand, in this war, members of the LGBTQ+ community feel that they seem to have disappeared from the radar as well as the difficulties they faced before

the war. No one carries out street actions, equality marches anymore. Throughout the occupied territories, it is a disaster. We know of cases where the police have come to houses, just looking for some newspapers... to start with. LGBTQ+ representatives are not superhuman - they are ordinary people, students, workers, for them it is a very stressful situation. This is strongly influenced by the standard of living of these people. There are also places where the enemy's attacks have destroyed premises where there were community centers. In addition, there is the fear of writing posts, hundreds of posts are deleted so that their authors cannot be found because it is dangerous. Now the attention to the issue of LGBT persecution is much less, because the country is drowning in a global problem, so of course the issue has been forgotten a bit. Someone [from the LGBTQ+ community] had relatives in the Donbass who had to go underground, become as grey as most people and cease to exist as a person. In Ukraine, LGBTQ+ people still don't have full rights (e.g. you can't get married, you can't have children), but activists are working on it. Our organisation has provided financial support to LGBTQ+ representatives. But on the other hand, there

are happy events. For example, in Berlin this year, for the first time, the Ukrainian LGBTQ+ community was active, despite all the difficulties that have been caused by this war. The LGBTQ+ community became more visible in pride marches that took place in other countries. Some pages on social networks - Instagram show messages about LGBTQ+ people who are on the front lines. Russia also uses LGBTQ+ people in its propaganda. There is often 'news' about them fighting Nazi homosexuals in Mariupol and they show gay magazines they allegedly found with swastikas, and they conclude: 'It's not for nothing that we kill Ukrainians'.

Finally, can you tell us a bit about the landscape of the feminist movement in Ukraine, its groups, its history?

Unfortunately, we are not experts in this field, so we will say what we know, but it is far from a complete picture of the feminist movement in Ukraine.

In recent years, feminism in Ukraine has become an increasingly popular and powerful political movement. There are feminist groups of very different orientations - from the far left to the moderate right, from queer activists to transexclusive groups. The feminist movement in general is

represented by various organizations, but there are also unofficially registered grassroots initiatives, which is what we are.

Before the start of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, most of the women's movement as a whole was engaged in educational, women's rights, movement building and development activities in Ukraine. However, since 24 February, many organizations have changed their activities to overcome the consequences of the war, to help women suffering from the war.

Do you have relations with other feminist groups, especially abroad?

Currently, in Ukraine, we have relations with the feminist organization Feminist Workshop, as well as with feminist activists in Kharkiv and Dnipro.

As far as foreign countries are concerned, we do not have close relations or constant contacts with any group, but from time to time representatives of the women's movement from different countries write to us, wanting to know more about our activities. We have also received donations from European left-wing initiatives and organizations on several occasions. Our members have also participated in feminist online meetings with feminists from the European Solidarity Network

with Ukraine, and have participated in the drafting of a manifesto of Ukrainian feminists.

A more personal question: which authors or thinkers have inspired you?

Lisa: I have been personally inspired by artists who, through their work, show the conditions in which women find themselves and how they struggle. Among them, Marina Abramovych, Ada Rybachuk, Teodozija Bryzh. For me, it's not about inspiration, it's about the reality you see and want to change.

Ivanka: I don't want my friends to die, even though since the war started I have little

contact with them, many of them are in other countries, but the power of friendship is stronger and stays with me. I am suffocating, yet I have the strength to adapt, to resist the stress and to keep my spirit alive. I didn't understand how I was given to live, but now I have lost everything. In life, I try to work like a "visnovka", I hang on even if I have less hope that Ukraine will defeat the Russian occupiers!

Zhenya: Above all, I was inspired not by thinkers, but by examples of real grassroots activists who speak honestly about the position of women in a patriarchal and capitalist world, who organize

rallies and conferences on the themes of fighting gender-based violence, women's and queer rights, resistance to heteronormativity and others. I am inspired by women and queer people who openly declare their political position, talk about traumatic experiences and courageously defend their rights, even if society as a whole condemns them. Very often I reflect on the experience of our initiative and what Bilkis has managed to do in its years of existence and it inspires me.

Yana: There are no specific women authors who inspire me. However, I have always been inspired by one or another of the thoughts of various women authors, which relate to issues of justice, freedom and equality. It is inspiring to talk about political and ethical issues in my circle of colleagues and friends, to think together about big questions.

I am also inspired by the people around me, who are as ideological as possible as well as deeply committed to the work they do.

Let's turn to the period after 24 February. How did you experience the Russian tank invasion and the imperialist aggression?

Lisa: I lived through the invasion of Russia in Kyiv, staying at home alone and not knowing what to do - my friend, with whom I lived for

6 years, left me alone in the flat on the morning of 24 February. My other friends took care of me and helped me to leave Kyiv and go to another city to visit my relatives; we drove for 17 hours, while the journey usually takes 5 hours. I spent 3 months in a town with my relatives in western Ukraine - which was also bombed, I heard explosions and saw a fire. I am from Crimea, so this is the second time I have lost my home and my life to Russian aggression and Russians.

Zhenya: I woke up early in the morning in Kharkiv because of the noise of the bombs, I called my father, who had a car and could take me and my friends from Kharkiv to Poltava (my hometown); from there we planned to go to Lviv, and later to Germany. I spent the first two months of the war in Germany, in Potsdam. I took part in demonstrations calling on the German government to impose an embargo on oil and gas from Russia and to supply arms to Ukraine. Together with my friends, we also printed leaflets and distributed them at these demonstrations. However, I felt out of context and really wanted to go back to Ukraine, as I understood that here I could provide more important and meaningful help, for example, with the

humanitarian crisis that occurred due to the Russian aggression. In general, about all my memories of the period since the beginning of the large-scale war, I feel that it is a kind of terrible dream, and my memories are shrouded in fog. I have not felt the arrival of spring and summer, it is as if I am still living in February.

Yana: On 24 February, at 5 a.m., I woke up to the sound of explosions. On 23 February, I had celebrated my 23rd birthday.

I immediately made the decision to leave the city - Kharkiv, and after almost a week we arrived in Lviv with my friends. We spent almost a day on the train, which usually takes 12 hours. Then it took us 16 hours to get from Lviv to Przemyśl: normally it takes 3 hours. I went to Germany for two months, but I came back to Ukraine because I felt the need to be here. My main pain in this war, apart from the general pain, is that my family - mother, grandmother and 11-year-old sister - have been under occupation in the Kharkiv region since 27 February and until today. There is no connection, no internet. I talk to my mother about once a month, and I live from call to call. The constant worry for the life and health of my loved ones has a strong impact on my mental health. Every time I think about

the fact that in my country there has been a war in the east for 8 years, and for the last six months a full-scale war, I feel a strong sense of unrealisation. I can't believe that this is possible and that it is happening here and now.

Ivanka: I come from the Donbass, this is the second war I have known in my life. In the first one I ran in Kharkiv, in the second one in Lviv. On 23 February I had one of the happiest days of my life, I felt that winter was ending, and with it my depressive life cycle. On the 24th of February I woke up to a call from a friend who was concerned for my safety, and for several hours my psyche refused to accept reality as truth; I thought it was all a dream. I spent the first days of the war in Kharkiv, then waited for the train for many hours in the cold and was evacuated to Lviv, where I still live today.

How did the war change Bilkis' activities and more broadly what is your analysis of this aggression from a feminist point of view, especially because we know that women are victims of particular violence in the conflict (rape, exile, social insecurity...).

Bilkis changed its register of activities to meet the needs of the Ukrainian population. The main thing for Ukrainians who lost everything was to provide

them with shelter, food and medicine. Our educational activity in Bilkis was put on hold in order to meet the basic human needs of the moment, which have grown incredibly large due to the destruction of our people by Russia.

The hearts of Ukrainians are filled with great pain, precisely because of the suffering of women and children - which the Russians are bringing to our land. Russia's aggression has shown us the horrifying extent of the violence that Russian men are capable of and the vulnerability of Ukrainian women and children to the aggressor. From a feminist point of view, knowing the crimes committed against women - we clearly understand one thing, we need even more protection for women, and for our protection: we need weapons. Russia and Russians are absolute criminals who must be punished for the crimes against our people, against our women and children.

On your Facebook page you say "We had our own project to fund the LGBTQ+ community, provide humanitarian aid to mothers with children, elderly women". How did this work out in practice?

We have been involved in humanitarian aid. We accepted requests from acquaintances and acquaintances of acquaintances.

We published posts and forms for people in need, we helped a little with money we had for evacuation of people fleeing the war and to find transport and/or accommodation for families who needed it. All donations and grants were spent on humanitarian work. We were able to process about 700 applications, i.e. help about 700 families. One of the challenges we faced was the number of applications, it was more than we could physically and financially handle.

Oops... I forgot to ask you why the name Bilkis, what does it mean?

We thought long and hard about choosing a name and decided to use the name Bilkis - the Queen of Sheba, described in Muslim mythology as the goddess of love and all the poor, a half-demon, a witch. In the television series *American Gods*, Neil Gaiman depicts her as a sex worker who eats men through their vaginas after sex. We found this story symbolic and interesting and we took the name of this goddess for our group.

30 July 2022

Interview by Patrick Le Tréhondat

Activity log

Bilkis

We found time to take a little break, and at the moment to write a post about our activities in March-June 2022, that is to say from the beginning of the war until today. From the first weeks of the war, our members started to engage in humanitarian aid. Also in March and April, we helped a little to finance the evacuations and the search for transport and/or accommodation for the families in need.

During these 4 months we have received several grants and donations - all spent on a humanitarian cause.

We had our own project to help the LGBTQ+ community, provide humanitarian aid to mothers with children, elderly women, also send medicines and food parcels to disabled and/or chronically ill people, and at their request send medicines to Kharkiv, where our comrade distributed them to women.

During our stay in Lviv, we sent parcels to eastern and central

Ukraine. Mostly it was to Dnipro and Kropyvnytsky, as this is where many people from the Donetsk and Luhansk regions were evacuated.

During this period we were able to process around 700 applications, helping around 700 families. Our team originally had 5 members and 4 last month, so we think that's a lot for our small team!

How did we help?

Medicine and medical equipment
Food kits

Hygiene and household products
Nappies for children and adults
Baby food

Unfortunately, there are more applications than we can handle materially and financially. But all this time we have been working to the maximum and always trying to optimise the process so that we can help those we can as quickly and efficiently as possible.

At this stage we are still delivering humanitarian aid, but on a smaller scale. Firstly, because of finances, we have little left at the moment; secondly, because of exhaustion. Such work requires a lot of energy, so now we try to combine our activities in other

directions that give us strength and inspiration

We are so grateful to everyone who has donated; your contribution has made all this help possible!

28 July 2022

Yesterday we sent 16 parcels to the town of Chuguyiv, Kharkiv region. Last week, a woman wrote to us asking for help and told us that she and 15 other people live,

almost all the time, together in the basement of their house. In one week we collected 16 parcels: each one weighs about 20 kg.

We put food, hygiene products, household goods, and medicines in the warehouse. This time we had the help of other activists who helped us load and move parcels from our warehouse to the post office. We are very grateful to them for this. The parcels are still on their way, but we really hope that they will arrive as soon as possible and that the people of Chuguyiv will receive help as soon as possible

The 26th of February with our initiative will be an unforgettable day. All this because on Sunday we will start a new activity, which will be called “Food Station”.

All homeless and low-income people need basic, affordable and above all regular help. Each of us can imagine what it is like not to be able to keep warm in the cold,

neither outside nor inside. One of our members and her partner are planning to cook vegan meals and bring them to feed the homeless and others in need.

Our cooks will prepare about 100 portions of food and thermos of hot drinks on Sunday morning to be on site at 12:00 to serve all those in need with home-cooked meals.

The distributions will be made in Mazepa Street, right from the Poplar market on the playground. Our help does not require any political or religious opinion, documents or prayers from the people to receive it. You can just come for a hot lunch, no matter what your circumstances are.

We have some cooking skills and a great desire to change the world and make life easier for vulnerable groups.

With experience, we will understand how to optimise the process, what mistakes we have made and how to correct them. And while we are already publicly announcing that 100 portions of borscht with bread and tea are being prepared for its first distribution.

We would be very grateful for the shares, stories and mentions of our offline living initiative.

February 2023

Bilkis in the international campaign “16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence”.

Bilkis

For the fourth consecutive year, our group participated in the international campaign “16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence”. In these difficult times, we tried to draw the public’s attention to this issue, to spread as much information as possible.

One of our activities, which has been and remains central to us, is the collection and publication of personal stories of women who have survived gender-based violence. We know how difficult it can be to talk about it; we know how difficult it can be to experience it. We see that it is a very taboo subject in society and that victim blaming is very common.

We want to give space for your voice, for your reflection on this subject, for you to live it. Every year we have published 16 stories,

this year we have published 16 stories.

In addition, we carried out street activities: putting up posters on the importance of the concept of consent, distributing leaflets on domestic violence, and also organized a series of actions against the Drunk Cherry brand.

On the importance of the concept of consent, we used images of cats to draw attention to our posters, which offered short messages: “Silence is not a sign of consent. Silence is a sign of not responding. Take it as a ‘no’!”, “Feminine no means no! A feminine yes means yes! Just like $2 \times 2 = 4$ ” etc.

We also organized several open events: lectures on gender-based violence and violence in art; screening of films from the online film festival Filma.

15 December 2022

Lviv : feminist group Bilkis harassed by fascists

Patrick Le Tréhondat

For several days, the Lviv feminist group has been campaigning against the liquor brand Drunk Cherry, which displays a nude woman on its bottle labels.

The feminist group explains their campaign as follows, “Yesterday [Saturday 26 November] we held a rally near one of П’яна вишня» [Drunk Cherry] locations¹. We were with posters “Stop sexualising women”, “The female body is not your advertisement”, “Boycott the sexists”, and an activist painted a man in the style that П’яна вишня sees women, that is, naked and with a cherry. Our demands are unchanged : no to the representation calling for violence and no to the sexualisation

1. A brand of liqueurs in Lviv whose bottle labels show naked women. On its website, the brand says «every housewife in Lviv made this liqueur and every young woman knew this taste. It has been helping to find lovesince the 17^e century.» PLT

of women. Unfortunately we are not heard. So today we continue our fight and demonstrate again in front of the same establishment from 3pm to 5pm, join us!”

Bilkis organized weekend rallies in front of one of the Drunk Cherry shops in Lviv. But in the week following one of these rallies, the fascist group Katarsis issued threats against Bilkis in view of his mobilization on 3-4 December 2002 and Bilkis immediately reacted:

“However, we must warn you: the other day we received a message from Katarsis. We believe that this is a call for intimidation. Therefore, we want to warn you that there may be provocations or attacks during and after the mobilization. And we know that activists from Katarsis or similar organizations may attack activists after the action. For us, these intimidations are not a reason not to have actions, because this is exactly what they are trying to achieve. But we don’t want to put you in danger, so honestly we are warning you about the situation.

Katarsis is a neo-Nazi group with a strong street presence that publishes personal information

about left-wing activists. Its Telegram channel has 135,000 subscribers, mainly neo-Nazis and fascists, and its active activists are numerous. Maxim, a left-wing activist in Lviv, told us “It sucks because they posted a lot of my personal data”.

On Saturday 3 December, Katarsis was present at the Bilkis rally and there was a mini clash between an activist from Sotsialnyi Rukh (Social Movement) and a Nazi. The next morning Bikkis said: ‘On Saturday 3 December we organized a street action for the third time in front of one of the establishments of The Drunk Cherry. Katharsis supporters also came with their posters: ‘Nudes are cheap’, ‘leave the woman naked and send the radicals to the front’. These are the lies and manipulations in the public space that are engaged by those who are for discrimination in advertising. Very imperial, because these are the mechanisms of Russian propaganda. We are still surprised by the arguments of the proponents of sexism and rape culture. So come to the mobilization today Sunday from 3 to 5 pm!’

The Sotsialnyi Rukh (Social Movement) on Sunday morning said:

“Drunk Cherry is known for its terrible treatment of workers’

rights, corruption and the parroting of gender stereotypes. The demonstration on 3 December attracted attention on social networks and raised questions about the right to free demonstration during the war. There were no immediate threats of physical violence from anti-democratic ultra-right youths, but an attempt to “catch” activists after the mobilization had ended. In addition, unidentified young men who came to the rally took pictures and carried fake posters in order to discredit the activists.”

On Sunday, December 4, Bilkis activists were again present in front of the shop with their sign from 2pm to 5pm (by -1 in Lviv). The fascists were there too, but due to the presence of the police, things went well. Bilkis had organized a live on instagram of the picket.

Monday morning December 5, taking stock of their mobilization, Bilkis declared:

“Yesterday, we held our mobilization in front of one of the Drunk cherry establishments. Despite provocations from right-wing youth and some negative comments from passers-by, we had incredible support both on the streets and on our social networks

this weekend ! The police present tried to explain to us that there is no sexism and discrimination at Drunk cherry. One of the officers even urged passers-by to visit the store. In total, we organized 4 mobilizations. We remind you that these actions took place within the framework of the international action of 16 days of active action against gender-based violence. Violence against women must be completely eradicated from our society!”

11 December 2022













The anti-capitalist “space of things”

Patrick Le Tréhondat

The feminist group Bilkis opened in Lviv an anti-capitalist “space of things” on 2nd August 2022. The space, which is open every Tuesday and Thursday from 4pm to 7pm, is intended to be a place where people can leave things or take them. Clothes, medicines, books, crockery and household items have been stocked on the shelves of the space, which aims to be “a real alternative to existing market relations and is based on mutual aid and cooperation”. The Lviv feminists declared at the time of its opening: “The capitalist machine of society tries to convince us that buying and selling is the only possible option. Brand culture, fashion trends, new things are what is destroying our planet and they are not for people who cannot afford to buy them. Millions of workers, mostly in the Global South, are exploited in the factories of the big companies and brands that produce these goods,

intensifying the cult of consumption.” In the announcement of the opening of the new space, the Lviv feminists specified their ambitions “What are the possible anti-capitalist practices that relate to things?” and added “Visitors are always welcome whether you bring something, or take something with you, or just drop in to say hello.

Before the full-scale war, the Bilkis group, originally from Kharkiv, which has since fled to Lviv, was developing feminist popular education, organizing demonstrations and rallies against gender-based violence and public meetings. But since 24 February, the feminist group has had to face new tasks, for which it had no experience. It has put all its strength into humanitarian activities with impressive results. For example, on 21 July 2022 alone, the group announced that it had sent 21 packages to Dnipro. In total, 62,000 Hryvnia (12,500 euros) of individual parcels, including nappies, baby food, medicines and hygiene products, had been spent in that month alone. A few weeks later, the group announced that it had supported another 35 families

with children. By the beginning of September 2022, Bilkis claimed to have helped 700 families.

However, Bilkis has not abandoned her feminist activities. This was demonstrated by their active participation in the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence in November and December. During the 16 Days, the group launched a campaign to denounce the brand Drunken Cherry, a brand of liquor that displays a naked woman on its bottles, and organized three rallies in Lviv in front of one of the shops of the sexist brand. The last rally resulted in being harassed by fascists from the Katharsis group and denounced by a city councilor who went so far as to contact the SBU (Ukrainian security services) to have Bilkis' activities stopped. Not intimidated by these maneuvers, the day after this last rally, Bilkis put up posters in the streets of Lviv on sexual consent and the day after distributed leaflets on violence against women in front of the Lviv Opera House.

January 16, 2023

АНТИКАПІТАЛІСТИЧНІ ПРАКТИКИ





Activistka, a new feminist zine in Lviv

Patrick Le Trehondat

On December 23, after many initiatives taken as part of the “16 days against violence against women”, the feminist group Bilkis presented its new zine *Activistka*. Among the mobilizations of this group in recent weeks was the campaign against the sexist brand of alcohol Drunk Cherry which provoked the harassment of Bilkis by the city’s fascists and councilman Scholtis. Then a poster collage on the walls of the city for sexual consent and finally a distribution of leaflets in front of the Lviv Opera against violence against women. The zine *Activistka* was printed in 50 copies for financial reasons, but is widely distributed on social networks in its pdf form. “This zine is dedicated to women and queer people who engage in grassroots activism, who help with humanitarian relief, who defend our country at the front or in the rear, who organize cultural and educational events, or

who simply continue to work and take care of themselves despite the war” explain its editors who add “We draw attention to the fact that women and homosexual people are fighting simultaneously on two fronts: first, against the patriarchal and capitalist system, and second, against Russia, a terrorist state, and the consequences of its aggression. In summary, a long interview with feminist activists on their lives, their experience of war and their commitments. Nata from Kiyiv explains that “in 2017, I was outraged that only beauty contests were held on March 8th in the whole university of Kiyv... Then I started making zines about women and transgender people in precarious work, to get involved in solidarity cooking, to correspond with Kremlin prisoner Zhenya Karakashev [imprisoned Russian anarchist activist]”. For Marina Gaaba “during the Dignity Revolution, I understood that I had to stay in my city and not go to the Maidan in Kyiv. The Maidan in my city was run by men, and this atmosphere was difficult for me. However, there was active communication on special networks, I found friends

there, we formed a temporary association “Centuries of sisters”, and we organized a small women’s march. Lisa is a soldier. “There is too much prejudice, sexism, and neglect in the army. But I’m not saying that we shouldn’t achieve our aspirations to defend the country in the military sphere, it’s more about the fact that female soldiers have a difficult path to walk, and they have to be a little stronger and aware that male soldiers... A strong minority is able to resist the pressure of the majority and that is our role in this war. Let’s unite and break this rock. For Katia of the Feminist Workshop “the biggest difficulty is that when you are an activist, you are a thorn in the side of all the other people. When you say you are a feminist, you are immediately asked for “proof”: how you were discriminated against, who beat you, if you were raped, who insulted you... I am one of those people who have need to see the tangible results of their work, otherwise I would have worn myself out a long time ago. But I’m lucky: the world I want to live in and leave behind is being built before my eyes. »

January 2, 2023

To download *Activistka*

https://drive.google.com/.../1Z_R_rRD.../view









"Self-organisation will not disappear without leaving traces"

Interview with Bilkis

You claim to be an anti-capitalist and anti-patriarchal group. Does this mean that you consider Ukraine to be a capitalist country? We notice that in your activities you insist on free of charge. A form of demerchandization. Is this the main anti-capitalist dimension of your activities?

In one way or another, all countries in the world are capitalist, and Ukraine is no exception. Our country has some social guarantees, free health care and education, but that does not make it anti-capitalist. We would like to see the social side of the state become stronger, to see people's economic rights better protected, to see the value of wealth change into the value of collective welfare. At the moment we have a project called "The Space of Things", which is a space without

money, without exchange or other capitalist instruments. We try to show people that it is possible to live and have things without money, that money is a convention that can be eliminated. Also, this month we have launched the 'Feeding ourselves' project. Every Sunday we feed the homeless and people in need with a hot lunch; we also disseminate information about the Space of Things among them.

Fighting against patriarchy in wartime does not seem obvious. And yet you are very active on this subject. Why is this necessary in such a difficult period? I saw that you support the demands of women soldiers. A stance that is not often seen in the Western feminist movement. Can you tell me why you are committed to women soldiers? Can this be seen as a weakening of Ukraine's military defence?

Why is this necessary in such a difficult time? The answer is simple: because patriarchy does not disappear because of war, domestic violence still exists, sexist signs still exist, harassment still exists. There is no point in putting your activism on hold

because of the war (unless you are involved in military operations or in the armed forces); life goes on, the problems remain.

Why are we involved in the issue of women in the military? First of all, because one of our members has been in the Ukrainian armed forces for a year now, and many of our feminist friends have also joined the army and are defending our country. And of course, because we generally see how many women are involved in this field, and they often have different problems because of their gender.

Of course, this is not very common among Western feminists, because there is no war in their countries. It's hard for us to talk about pacifism and anti-militarism now. I mean, in theory you could be against wars, against guns, against the army, but when your house is occupied, when it is destroyed day after day, when your family is killed by a rocket, that theory doesn't work. Either you take up arms, or tomorrow you may not be here.

In our view, being anti-militaristic is a security privilege. It is easy to give up the army when your country is not being wiped off the face of the earth, or when you are not personally threatened.

None of us like war, guns or people with guns, but we like the

idea of being killed physically or culturally even less.

Everything you do, the sending of parcels, the Space of Things and more recently the free distribution of food is the result of your self-organisation. Since the state can't provide all this, you do it. Do you think that these activities, in their own way, show that civil society can do as much as the state, or even better? And how can we ensure that this power of self-organisation in Ukrainian society does not disappear and return to the situation before the war? And if so, how to protect this spirit of self-organisation?

Ukrainian society today is an example of how people can organise themselves for a purpose. We believe that yes, civil society can do (or even does) more than the state in some respects. We would like this experience to show the people of our country that it is they, this civil society, who are the state, i.e. they are the political force that can and must change everything around them. In fact, it is difficult to say whether and how this level of self-organisation can be maintained after the war. However, it seems to us that this experience itself does not disappear without leaving traces, that

somehow it changes people's values and practices.

Looking at your activities and your writings, I have the impression that self- management is at the heart of your projects. Grassroots organisation, radical democracy, managing your own affairs to build alternative projects to capitalism. Does the concept of self-management seem to you to be the right one to describe the political meaning of your activities?

Yes, this description is accurate. We try to make all decisions in a collaborative way, and we are all equally involved and equal in our initiative. We also practice open communication and discuss all problems and misunderstandings immediately, which improves our work and relationships.

3 March 2022

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