



FEMEN



**F E M E N**



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**BY**

**FEMEN**

With Galia Ackerman

Translated by Andrew Brown

polity

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# MANIFESTO

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE BODY, THE SENSATION THE WOMAN HAS OF HER OWN BODY, THE JOY OF ITS LIGHTNESS AND FREEDOM. THEN CAME INJUSTICE, SO HARSH THAT IT IS FELT WITH THE BODY; INJUSTICE DEPRIVES THE BODY OF ITS MOBILITY, PARALYSES ITS MOVEMENTS, AND SOON YOU ARE HOSTAGE TO THAT INJUSTICE. THEN YOU PUSH YOUR BODY INTO BATTLE AGAINST INJUSTICE, MOBILIZING EACH CELL FOR THE WAR AGAINST THE WORLD OF PATRIARCHY AND HUMILIATION. YOU SAY TO THE WORLD:

OUR GOD IS WOMAN!  
OUR MISSION IS PROTEST!  
OUR WEAPONS ARE BARE BREASTS!  
HERE FEMEN IS BORN, AND HERE BEGINS  
SEXTREMISM.

## FEMEN

Femen is an international movement of bold, topless activists whose bodies are covered with slogans and whose heads are crowned with flowers.

The activists of Femen are women who are specially trained, physically and psychologically, ready to perform humanist tasks of every degree of complexity and provocation. The activists of Femen are ready to face repression, and their motivation is exclusively ideological. Femen: the crack troops of feminism, its fighting vanguard, a modern incarnation of the Amazons, fearless and free.

## OUR IDEOLOGY

We live in a world under the economic, cultural and ideological occupation of men. In this world, woman is a slave deprived of any right to ownership and, in particular, any right of ownership over her own body. All the functions of the female body are subjected to strict control and regulation by patriarchy.

A woman's body has become separated from her, becoming the object of monstrous patriarchal exploitation. Total control over the female body is the main instrument of woman's oppression. Conversely, a female sexual tactic is the key to her liberation. Woman's proclamation of her rights over her own body is the first and most important step towards her liberation. Female nudity, liberated from the patriarchal system, undermines that system. It is the manifesto of struggle and the sacred symbol of female liberation.

Femen's naked-bodied attacks lie at the heart of the historical conflict between 'woman' and 'the system', and they are its most obvious and appropriate illustration. The naked body of an activist expresses unconcealed hatred for

the patriarchal order and the new aesthetic of the feminine revolution.

## OUR OBJECTIVE

Total victory over patriarchy.

## OUR MISSIONS

- By the power of daring and personal example, to pass a comprehensive feminine sentence on patriarchy as a form of slavery.
- To provoke patriarchy into open conflict by forcing it to demonstrate its anti-human, aggressive essence so as to discredit it once and for all in the eyes of history.
- To ideologically undermine the fundamental institutions of patriarchy, dictatorship, the sex industry, and the Church, by submitting these institutions to diversionary tactics such as trolling, to obtain their complete moral capitulation.
- To make propaganda for the new revolutionary feminine sexuality, as opposed to patriarchal eroticism and pornography.
- To inject modern women with the culture of an active resistance to evil and the fight for justice.
- To create the community that is most influential and best able to fight in the world.

## OUR DEMANDS

- The immediate political reversal of all dictatorial regimes that create intolerable living conditions for women; in the first place, the rule of theocratic Islamic states practising *sharia* and other forms of sadism vis-à-vis women.

- The total eradication of prostitution, the most brutal form of women's exploitation, by criminalizing the clients, investors and organizers of this slave trade. The absolute and universal separation of Church and state, with a ban on any interference on the part of religious institutions in the civil, sexual and reproductive lives of modern women.

## OUR TACTICS: SEXTREMISM

Sextremism is the main new form of feminist activism developed by Femen.

Sextremism is female sexuality that has risen up against patriarchy by embodying itself in extreme political acts of direct action. The sexist style of these actions\* is a way of destroying the patriarchal idea of the predestination of female sexuality, in favour of its great revolutionary mission. The extreme nature of sextremism is a manifestation of the superiority of Femen activists over the vicious dogs of patriarchy. The form of unauthorized sextremist actions expresses woman's historical right to protest in any place and at any time, without coordinating her actions with the patriarchal structures that maintain order.

Sextremism is a non-violent but highly aggressive form of activism; it is a super-powerful, demoralizing weapon that undermines the foundations of a corrupt patriarchal culture.

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\* The French word 'action' is here used both in the sense of a 'direct action' and a 'demonstration' of an artistic-political kind. It has links with what in the English-speaking world are (or were) often known as 'happenings' or 'performance art', and – as the Femen themselves point out – with the politico-aesthetic movement known as 'actionism'. (Trans. note.)

## OUR SYMBOLS

The crown of flowers is a symbol of femininity and proud disobedience. It is the crown of heroism.

The body-as-poster is a truth expressed by the body with the help of nudity and the signs drawn upon it.

The Femen logo is the Cyrillic letter Ф (F), which mimics the shape of the female breasts, the main symbol of the women's movement Femen.

Femen's motto: my body is my weapon!

## OUR STRUCTURE AND ACTIVITY

The international movement Femen carries out activities on the territory of democratic countries and reserves the right to act on the territories controlled by dictatorial regimes. Femen is registered as an international organization, and is currently establishing national Femen groups throughout the world. It seeks to expand the geography of its activity by attracting new activists. The preparation of extremists is carried out in several training centres such as in France. The movement is led by a coordinating council which includes the founding members of the movement and its most experienced activists.

## OUR FINANCING

To ensure the activities of our organization, Femen accepts donations from people who share its ideas and methods of combat. Femen also sells clothing and accessories with its symbols, and art objects of its own making. The movement is not dependent on any investor and refuses on principle to accept any financial assistance from political parties, religious organizations, or other lobbyists.

All the funds earned and collected serve the goals of the movement.

The only source of distribution of Femen's production is the site: <<http://www.femenshop.com>>.

## **INFORMATION**

Femen professes the principle of openness to the media, to ensure maximum media coverage of its revolutionary activity in defence of women's rights.

At the same time, the movement is involved in a campaign for information and aggressive propaganda on the Internet, using the Web to transmit its ideology. Femen is present on all major social networks and communities on the Net.

The official sources of information on the activities of the Femen movement are the website <<http://www.femenshop.com>> and the Facebook page <<http://www.facebook.com/Femen.ua>>.

Femen, Kiev, January 2013

## A MOVEMENT OF FREE WOMEN

*Preface by Galia Ackerman*

At the age of fourteen or fifteen, these girls started to get bored. Their friends spent their time drinking beer out in the street and chatting or taking drugs, but none of these four young Ukrainian girls were really into any of this. In their poor backwoods towns, Anna Hutsol, Inna Shevchenko, Oksana Shachko and Sasha Shevchenko were looking for a meaning to their lives. With the help of a few Soviet books, they fantasized about the days when communist youth built up the country. That was before their time. Only Anna, a little older than the other three, could remember her early Soviet days, a happy childhood which for her has the taste of tangerines and chocolate.

Although they had heard of Stalin's crimes, as far as they were concerned this was all in the distant past, while in the last years of the USSR, their parents lived peaceful lives and felt useful and respectable. Of course, reality was more complex and much less rosy, and concealed profound inequalities. But for them, nothing could be compared to the

toxic atmosphere of the 1990s or the 2000s. The girls felt hatred for the wild west-style capitalism that allowed a happy few to get rich quickly and scandalously, and that laid waste the lives of ordinary people, including their families.

Against this backdrop of a loathing for capitalism in its post-Soviet guise, Sasha, Oksana and Anna discovered a circle of Marxist-influenced people holding street discussions in their hometown, Khmelnytskyi, in western Ukraine. A group of young people met regularly to study Soviet philosophy textbooks found in attics, as well as the works of Marx, Engels and the nineteenth-century German socialist August Bebel.

These young people were opposed to the current political and moral consensus.

During perestroika and in the early post-Soviet years, it was customary – in Russia as in Ukraine – to denigrate the Soviet period.

In Ukraine, national grievances had been superimposed on this discourse: the Soviet regime was accused of political and cultural imperialism, as well as crimes against the Ukrainian nation. President Yushchenko demanded that the UN recognize the artificial famine of 1932–3, which killed nearly 6 million people in Ukraine, as genocide.

And so, if we stick to the economy, both in Russia and Ukraine, official propaganda presented this liberalism – a liberalism that amounted to the plundering of national wealth by a handful of oligarchs close to the government – in the same way as did the Harvard School: it was seen as the only viable alternative to the dark communist past. In reality, this interpretation mainly gave a fake legitimacy to grossly unequal regimes. The power of the propaganda machine was such that, apart from the communist parties – viewed as backward-looking vestiges from the past – voices advocating social justice were very rare.

In this atmosphere of liberal diktat, it required a certain intellectual audacity to claim kinship with Marxism in the same way as other radical factions, such as the current Left Front of Sergei Udaltsov in Russia. The street circle of Khmelnytskyi continued to evolve, and some of its members, including three of the future Femen, tried putting into practice the lessons learned, by founding an association for student aid.

Meanwhile, for an entire year, the girls studied Bebel's *Women and Socialism*, which became their favourite book. It was a real revelation and they decided to dedicate themselves to fighting for the freedom of women. In Bebel, they found a 'scientific basis' for their spontaneous hatred of misogyny and capitalism, as well as of the religion that oppresses women, always and everywhere. Armed with this reading, Anna, Sasha and Oksana excluded their male friends from the association and created a new movement, New Ethics. Soon they moved to Kiev.

From spring 2008, their actions, which had initially been innocent and childish, involved dressing up and making a splash. They pondered. What should they protest against? How to find targets? During one of their brainstorming sessions, they found their first big topic: Ukraine is not a brothel. They rebelled against the sex industry that flourished in the country, under the aegis of the government, and against Westerners' perceptions of Ukrainian women, those 'Natashas' ready to fall into the arms of a 'Prince Charming' for a pittance or the promise of a *dolce vita* abroad.

During this struggle, which involved dozens of actions, the movement became more structured and renamed itself 'Femen'. In 2009, Inna, a student in Kiev who came from another provincial city, Kherson, joined the trio from Khmelnytskyi. These four were the backbone of the group. Gradually, Femen found its trademark: a young topless

woman with a crown of flowers on her head. In this book, they explain in detail the meaning of this ‘outfit’ that makes them recognizable worldwide.

In 2009, power in Ukraine was still in the hands of the coalition that emerged after the Orange Revolution. This revolution was a disappointment for many Ukrainians because the government – partly hampered by the global crisis – turned out to be unable to improve the economic situation in the country and to fight corruption. At the end of 2009, the country was polarized on the eve of the presidential election. Viktor Yanukovich, defeated in 2005, faced both the outgoing president Viktor Yushchenko and Yulia Tymoshenko, the former muse of the revolution who in the meantime had become an opponent and rival to Yushchenko. As in the past, Yanukovich was supported by the Russian regime.

The Femen, who do not want to be limited to issues traditionally seen as ‘feminine’, decided to join in the political struggle. They took up a position that would give them a very negative press in the eyes of many Ukrainians, choosing to be neither for the ‘blue’ camp of Yanukovich, whom they considered as a puppet of the big oligarchic capitalists of east Ukraine, nor for the ‘orange’ camp (supporters of Yushchenko or Tymoshenko), because of their political and economic fiasco. They harboured a particular hatred for Tymoshenko, an elegant and charismatic woman who was prime minister from December 2007 to March 2010, because in their view she did nothing to combat the sex industry or to improve the status of women. However, once Yanukovich had assumed power, the situation soon became clear to the girls. Despite its flaws, the Orange Revolution had brought several freedoms, while the regime that took over was becoming increasingly repressive. From this period, Femen grew politically more radicalized. Their new enemy

was dictatorship. The police, the judiciary and the SBU, the security service of Ukraine (an offspring of the Soviet KGB), kept them under surveillance. They experienced their first appearances in court, their first stays in jail and their first interrogations by SBU officials.

They realized that fighting for women's rights in today's Ukraine would be difficult and would involve rebelling against the police state. They also realized that Ukraine would never be free while Russia was governed by the 'Putin system', and they saw themselves as morally obliged to support the Russian opposition as it challenged the massive frauds perpetrated in the general elections of 2011. Femen undertook a series of spectacular actions both against the Yanukovich regime, in Kiev, and the Putin regime, in Moscow: they were held in Russian prisons.

What is extraordinary in Femen, and makes them very special in the post-Soviet arena, is their openness to the outside world. These girls respond to the status of women or the drift towards dictatorship in Ukraine, but they also show their solidarity with the democratic struggle of others. After their protests against the Putin regime – protests that were not actually much to the liking of the Russian opposition movement, which is too inward-looking and unappreciative of the boldness of these 'little Ukrainian girls' – they decided to attack the regime of Alexander Lukashenko, the Belarusian president who is considered to be the last dictator in Europe. Their Belarusian tour in December 2011, where they fell into an ambush laid by the sinister local KGB, was probably their most terrible experience. It could have ended in real tragedy. In two or three years, the girls had become seasoned fighters who, with their naked bodies covered with caustic slogans, were defying police officers armed with batons.

Quickly, they embarked on a new battle. As atheists since

their teens, they have fully assimilated Marx's famous phrase, 'religion is the opium of the people'. For them, religion is a tool for patriarchy to dominate women. The Femen therefore decided to launch an attack on clericalism, whether Islamic or Christian, because it is always women who suffer from it. After protesting in 2010 against the Iranian judicial decision to stone Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani to death, they gave a major role to anti-clerical struggle in their actions, from 2011 onwards. They were protesting in the Vatican and Kiev, in Moscow and Istanbul, in Paris and London.

We need to understand how much the Femen are going against the grain in Russia and Ukraine. In these countries, the Orthodox Church, which was persecuted in the Soviet period, has risen from the ashes but is gradually placing itself at the service of the state, to the point where it has become the de facto state religion in Russia. The Femen denounce its reactionary and outdated teachings, and its collusion with corrupt regimes. They denounce it even more violently than do the women of Pussy Riot. With the same energy and determination, they address the medieval practices of countries where *sharia* law prevails. They are not afraid of brushing against the spirit of tolerance of our Western societies: they call a spade a spade. In their view, for example, Europe must refuse to accept the wearing of the niqab or burqa. 'Muslim woman, get undressed!' – this is the slogan that best summarizes the appeal made by Femen to the Muslim women of the world, and especially those who live in the Western world.

Thanks to their anti-clericalism, the ideology of Femen can take on sharper edges. They are carrying out spectacular and more dangerous actions against what they see as the three manifestations of patriarchy: the sex industry, dictatorship and clericalism. Added to this are, of course, their purely anti-capitalist demands such as their actions at the

World Economic Forum in Davos. According to Femen, women are the first victims of the poverty imposed by the masters of the world.

The European media, but also the media of many other countries, eagerly cover the actions of Femen. It's as much the form as the content that attracts them. Each time, they can watch a mini-drama where the spectator's interest is aroused by the danger faced by the women taking part. Reports on Femen rarely explain their doctrine, but abound in spectacular photos. And of course, these young women are the food and drink of directors of documentaries.

How could it be otherwise? These girls sound the alarm on the bell tower of the cathedral of Kiev, climb the walls of the enclosure at Davos under the noses of snipers positioned on the roof, protest topless outside the largest mosque in Istanbul and attack the Catholic fundamentalists of Civitas disguised as 'naughty' nuns, wearing the inscription 'In Gay We Trust' on their chests. And snapshots of them fighting with the cops or security services are all part of the 'show'. We are confronted with a new phenomenon: the Femen use the means of an increasingly radical artistic actionism for purely political reasons, while deliberately refusing to recognize themselves as artists. This is the price these bold women pay, in full awareness, for the dissemination of their ideas.

In autumn 2012, the Femen moved to France, while maintaining their office in Kiev. It was at this time that I made their acquaintance. I met Inna, then the other three founders, Oksana, Sasha and Anna, passing through Paris. I built up this book from dozens and dozens of hours of interviews with them. These are their words. Why did I want to write this book for them?

As a journalist and expert on Russia and the post-Soviet

world, I had for several years been interested in the phenomenon of young radicals who preach Marxism and socialism, despite the disaster represented by the Soviet experience. The way I imagined Femen – as young idealist girls rebelling against untamed capitalism in its oligarchic version – was largely confirmed upon my first contact with them.

But I discovered much more than this: four young women of extraordinary courage, creative and modern and, above all, full of compassion for the women in distress around the world. And because they feel a genuine compassion, they are also capable of a fierce hatred for those who cause suffering. In this, they are of the same metal as the great revolutionaries. The Femen seem to me to be the heirs of the long line of rebellious women from the Tsarist era, such as Vera Zasulich, Vera Figner, Catherine Breshkovsky, Alexandra Kollontai, and many others. But of course, in the age of the Internet and of show business, their passion can lead to very different results. Instead of drifting into terrorism, the Femen, radical at heart, have found a method of tackling their enemies that is both fun and highly symbolic: they use the naked body instead of a gun or a bomb.

So why did I decide to help them tell their stories? Despite a number of ideological differences (I'm not a Marxist and I'm agnostic rather than atheist), I feel close to their struggle. I can only share their revolt against the sex industry, which is an abomination. But it is especially their fight against dictatorship that inspires me with the greatest sympathy. In Soviet times, I systematically supported dissidents and, nowadays, the democrats who oppose Putin's regime and other autocratic regimes in the post-Soviet world. I was and remain a close friend of some key figures of dissent and opposition in Russian politics, such as Anna Politkovskaya, Elena Bonner, Alexander Ginzburg, Vladimir Bukovsky and Sergei