

# **Feminist Solidarities and Forms of Collective Action: The Case of Saint Petersburg, Russia**

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# Introduction

Lack of sensibility to  
gender issues in  
dominant social  
discourse

VS

Growing interest to  
feminism in Russia:

- media discourse
- online-communities in  
social networks

Protection of  
“traditional” patriarchal  
values

# Theoretical Framework

## **Solidarity:**

- shared interests of the struggling group in opposition to the dominant group (Taylor, Van Dyke, 2004)
- the main vectors of cultural- & value-based tensions in intergroup communications, characteristics of sympathy & enmity (Omelchenko, Pilkington 2013)

## **Collective action:**

- resource availability-based mobilization possibility and joint action, based on group solidarity and aimed at pursuing mutual interests (Tilly, 1975; Della Porta, Diani 2001)

# **Research question**

What kinds of solidarities arise in Petersburg (Russia) feminist scene?

# Methods

- Ethnographic case-study (November 2015 – February 2017)
- Participant observation (32 days / field diaries)
  - The role of ‘observer as a participant’ (Gold, 1958)
- 28 interviews with feminists aged between 21 and 39

# Key vectors of cultural-based tensions

## Sex for sale definition

malicious practice, violence

*'I am mostly worried about **the problem of prostitution**, you know, trafficking, coercion'*

(Alyona, 25 y.o.)

VS

labor → sex-workers' agency

*'I know people who have **experience of sex work** or who consider such work as alternative'*

(Arina, 27 y.o.)

# LGBTIQ+ rights advocacy

**main feminist agenda**

*'I don't know what else you can do when there is an open genocide of LGBT in Chechnya'*

(Nadya, 25 y.o.)

**VS**

**boundaries between feminist & LGBTIQ scenes**

*'Well, we don't particularly like trans. Well, I'm neutral towards them, I do not care in principle'*

(Ira, 21 y.o.)

# Safe space perception

male-free space: men as ‘others’

VS

deconstruction of binary categories

*‘Well, who is the enemy for a feminist? Well, of course, the man’*

(Ira, 21 y.o.)

*‘queer is a more anarchist thing [for me], where it is equally important, I don’t know, not women, not cis-women, but all genders’*

(Nika, 22 y.o.)



# Interpretation of feminist agenda

## struggle for *women's* rights

*'There is a lot of hardcore stuff [among feminists], homophobia, and just people who manage to make their actions for everything good, but for intensity of some images... they don't self-reflect. They don't see anything besides feminism...'*

(Nika, 22 y.o.)

## struggle against multiple discrimination

*'I do not limit, not only women are important for me, other oppressed and migrants, and oppressed men are also important for me'*

(Oksana, 29 y.o.)

# Forms of collective action

## collective action as a festive event

*'And people who came to some kind of an hour and a half Sunday rally, to picket, I don't know, to be bored, to distribute flyers, to take flyers, they are like: "Hi, samba-band, yeah, we're hanging out, yeah!", mood improves, it's just felt very intensively, woow!'*

(Viktorija, 21 y.o.)

## ineffectiveness of street activism

*'Organizing nowadays a picket that will be visible for 3 persons, I don't want it, it is not efficient. It is efficient to somehow strengthen the bonds among feminists, grassroots bonds – it is interesting for me, but activism is not very interesting at the moment, and I don't have forces for that'*

(Katya, 24 y.o.)

# Local solidarities

*‘Forming around you a circle of people who you will spend more time with, sharing the same agenda and living in comfort, well, in more comfortable conditions and fighting for your own rights in your own kitchen...’*

(Nadya, 25 y.o.)

*‘I finally decided that I would just make some cozy feminist meetups, where you can sit and talk, without bickering, without a police truck, where you won’t get a blow to your head from a baton, without a massacre, that one wants this poster, another wants that poster and because they want to organize a different rally, they split up – there’s none of this. I just made meetings where feminists can communicate, get acquainted’*

(Katya, 24 y.o.)

# Conclusion

Conservative discourse in Russia → dispossession, marginalization, stigmatization of feminists

Vectors of cultural- & values-based tensions:

Polarized perception of sex for sale, importance of LGBTIQ+ rights advocacy, acceptance or denial of dichotomy ‘woman’/ ‘man’

Forms of collective action:

Ineffectiveness of street activism **VS** building/strengthening of local solidarities

Thanks for your attention!

## **Feminist grassroots initiatives**

- *LeftFem*
- *Feminist sewing cooperative*
- *Feminist discussion club*
- *Queer-feminist library*
- *Libertarian robototronics club*
- *Rythms of Resistance*
- *Fem-section of mixed martial arts*

## **Festivals:**

- *“Eve’s Ribs”*
- *LaDIY Fest*
- *QueerFest*

## **Online-communities:**

- *“sister to sister! Mutual help”*
- *“Shut your sexist mouth up”*