

THE

# Final Straw

A WEEKLY ANARCHIST SHOW

The Final Straw is a weekly anarchist and anti-authoritarian radio show bringing you voices and ideas from struggle around the world.

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The Final Straw Radio  
March 23, 2023



This week, we're sharing an interview with Leo, an anarchist and eco-feminist from Russia who has temporary relocated to Europe after facing political repressions. Leo is a co-organizer with the Feminist Anti-War Resistance movement, a network of activists in and outside of Russia involved in struggling against the war in Ukraine and the Putin regime.

For the hour we speak about Russians facing repression for speaking out against the war inside the country, supporting anti-war initiatives such as sabotage and counter-recruitment, Imperialism and anti-Imperialism, forefronting the voices and experiences of Ukrainians experiencing the invasion, Ukrainians who've been forcibly re-settled into Russia and supporting Ukrainians resisting the Russian military within their own country, growing hetero-patriarchy within Russia and more.

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**Leo:** Hi, my name is Leo, though it's not my real name. I'm a participant in the Feminist Anti-War Resistance movement and a feminist, anti-war, and environmental activist.

**TFSR: What is the Feminist Anti-War Resistance movement? Where is it based if it's geographically located? What are the shared values? How are decisions made? Can you give us just a little information about that network or that movement?**

**L:** Feminist Anti-War Resistance movement started on the second day of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Several feminist activists from different regions of Russia, and from different feminist groups got together and discussed how they could react to this full-scale invasion. And we thought that the strength of the feminist movement in Russia, in general, is the ability to co-organize and network on a horizontal level, inter-regionally. And we decided that we have to build a Feminist Anti-War Resistance movement to collect our abilities, power, and skills to confront this war. First, it started inside Russia, but very quickly a lot of activists had to move abroad, had to relocate, and evacuate themselves, because they faced political repression. So right now it's an international movement. There's no base in some precise city or country. We have activists, coordinators, and volunteers in many different countries, and still, most of our activists are located in Russia.

**TFSR: That must be rather harrowing and scary for the people that are still operating inside of Russia. I'd like to ask a bit about the repression that people have faced inside of Russia for taking a stand or going to the streets around the war. But I want to ask a couple of other questions first. So, I imagine that the network has a lot of ideological heterogeneity and difference among the ideas of the people involved. For instance, I recall that one of your network members participated in an interview with Frequenz-A audio comrades of ours out of so-called Germany, and they described themselves as an anarchist. But my understanding is that the overall organization is not anarchist. Would you talk a bit about the principles that motivate you personally in your work with the Feminist Anti-War Resistance?**

**L:** Well, I consider myself a feminist anarchist, a leftist anarchist. I'm an eco-feminist with leftist anarchist views. And I know several other participants of the movement who also share the same political views as I do. At the same time, we have other participants who consider themselves rather leftist socialists. And some people are maybe more liberal. We for sure don't have people with alt-right or conservative views. But I think that when we began our movement, we didn't have the time and resources to build this on the base of exactly the same political views. Because, in general, the feminist movement in Russia is very diverse, and we have a lot of conflicts inside the movement. We have different political beliefs and strategies. So

it doesn't matter. Sometimes it's triggering for Ukrainian activists and people just to be in the same space with Russian citizens of any political views. And I respect that and I understand that. And I think it is really understandable. And it doesn't mean that it becomes less frustrating, but still, that's the reality. And I think even if the war stops today, we will have to spend decades trying to build up trust and these relationships and trying to build some bridges between Russian communities, activist communities, just ordinary communities of people and Ukrainian people. It's very hard and very heartbreakingly, but that's what we have. That's the reality we have. We have to work with it somehow. And I think we have to prioritize the feelings and the words and the voices of Ukrainian people because their opinions, I think, should be more important and more heard right now than the opinions of Russian citizens. And then my opinion, even though I know that I was very pure in my struggle and in my attitude towards the government decisions in Russia and the policies and the war and everything. It's even hard for me to speak about it. It's very sad because I think solidarity is a very important element of stopping the war, the solidarity between Ukrainian and Russian people. But I understand why often it is impossible to work shoulder to shoulder, because of all these issues, because of all this trauma.

**TFSR: Leo, thank you so much for having this conversation and having it in English and speaking with me for so long, and sharing so much. I really appreciate it. It's a lot of work and I really respect you. I wonder if you could just say a few words about how people can learn more about Feminist Anti-War Resistance, support your work, and maybe get involved, even if the resources are in Russian that could be helpful.**

**L:** Yes, sure. Thank you for having me on this podcast. English, is not my first language and sometimes I'm struggling to put my thoughts together in English. But you can always find us on social media. You can find Feminist Anti-War Resistance on Instagram and Facebook. Our Facebook page is in English, especially to be able to communicate with people from different countries. And you can always DM us or text us if you have any questions. You can read our manifesto to learn what we do because I didn't have enough time to say and describe all the kinds of resistance that we practice. And I would be very happy if it is possible in the description of this podcast to put the links about the Ukrainian anarchist organizations and resistance communities that can be supported and that your audience might be interested in. I think it will be an important act of solidarity for me to put a spotlight on the comrades from Ukraine.

**TFSR: For sure. I would be happy to do that.**

Ukrainian people who are using these colors and they're using these symbols, because this is a comfortable way for them right now to show their solidarity, to show that they belong to this nation, to this country, to this territory.

**TFSR:** There's a recognizing by using the colors and by soliciting a response to... Someone who's going to notice the color scheme is going to be thinking in terms of if they're going to think like, well, "is this some group of Russian people that are trying to undermine the war effort?" "Yes." "Is this a group of Russian people that are pro-Ukrainian state?" "Maybe." But yeah, it's good for being provocative. It's good probably for starting that conversation with people in Russia or in the diaspora who see that and maybe start asking these questions of what's going on here?

I mentioned the rise of nationalism on both sides of the border because war always does this. It draws people together in these groups and hardens the walls around them sometimes. It's really a pity that that also happens when people defend themselves, but that's a natural reaction that people have. I wondered if you had any thoughts about if you see an increased possibility... You've mentioned that people in Russia and in the diaspora who are involved with Feminist Anti-War Resistance have been working at times to try to help refugees from Ukraine. And there's obviously gotta be chatter back and forth about how best to resist the invasion, the continued war. When I talked to some Ukrainian activists who lived near the border, they said that over the last decade, relationships with anarchists and feminists and such over the border had been getting harder and harder.

Part of it, was because people just taking in nationalist viewpoints, whether they meant to or not, and part of it, was because just the border felt like a harder thing, especially with the war in Donbas. But I wonder if you see the opening of possibilities of more solidarity directly between people in Russia and people in Ukraine, or does the war have to end first for that to happen?

**L:** I think that it is a very frustrating story because the war started in 2014. And after that, I witnessed how a lot of connections between Russian activists and Ukrainian activists got ruined. And I think it's understandable that many Ukrainian initiatives and activists, even in the feminist sphere, didn't want to interact with Russian feminists, even though knowing that Russian feminist groups were 100% anti-Putin, anti-Kremlin, anti-war. But it's understandable when you have the invasion, the occupation, that you will be triggered by interacting with the people from the country who started this aggression. And right now, this only escalated.

I personally withdrew myself from several international events where I was invited to participate because I figured out that my participation won't be comfortable for Ukrainian participants. After all, it's just triggering for them, even though they know my position and how much work I do, and the history of my activism,

the same happened in the Feminist Anti-War Resistance. In the first few days when we started gathering, we wrote a manifesto where we decided to put all our ideas together, the ideas and beliefs based on which we can collaborate. So this manifesto is available in different languages, including English. You can find it on our social media.

Actually, after several months, we updated this manifesto, because of course the situation in terms of war was changing really quickly and we had to make our position more clear. So this is a fluid document that keeps updating depending on the circumstances. And I think it's important to say that a lot of people who joined our movement didn't have that much of an activist background before, and they were not that involved in any political movements or any opposition.

For many people, especially young people, this full-scale invasion became the first impulse to become politically aware and to join any protest activity. So I think it's very fair to be open to people who maybe don't have any strong political beliefs. They didn't find themselves in this yet. They didn't have enough time to figure out who they are: anarchist, socialist, or liberal.

It's okay. I think we have all been in that position at some point in our lives. So I think it's very good that we are open to different people and we are inclusive towards their path in their life, in their search for themselves and their identities.

**TFSR:** I appreciate that having a bounded definition that is feminism and then having a bunch of people that agree generally with the sentiment that this invasion at least is immoral and that gender inequality is an unjust thing... Having enough space where people talk to each other either in a movement or in an organization from differing positions and can debate and discuss.

I think your point is well taken. It allows for... You didn't have the time for purity of thought or whatever, but that also doesn't exist. But making space where people can engage with each other under the common banner of feminism to work out and hash out these details. I think it's super important because not everyone's starting from the same political position at the same time.

**Leo:** I think that it's impossible to follow this pure similarity in political beliefs when you are trying to build such a large network as we do. So for example, if you're having a small affinity group or a small initiative, you can organize it based on very similar political beliefs, and pure thoughts. But our goal and our strategy were to build a large network and use the tools and our skills to mobilize people to political action, to get involved in different protest activities, and humanitarian activities and to make connections, especially with the people who didn't have any activist experience before.

I think in these circumstances, it's impossible to stay very clear and very strict about who we collaborate with and who we invite to join our movement. I

think it's just different strategies because it's different scales and formats of activism and resistance.

And for me, right now I'm collaborating with people, even with those feminist activists with whom we had a lot of fights and conflicts before. But during this crisis, I understand that, okay, maybe I disagree with this person in this that and that, but I know that this person is professional and can do very good particular kinds of work, activist work, and have good skills in this, this and that.

I think in this crisis situation, for me, it's more productive to collaborate with this person and to leave our disagreements behind for a while, while there's so much work that has to be done and while we do have not enough hands and brains.

**TFSR: That makes sense. That's very well put. Does Feminist Anti-War Resistance take a position on self-defense, sabotage, or violent resistance to the war by the people of Ukraine or by people within Russia since the invasions occurred?**

**L:** In our manifesto, we have a section exactly about this, but there is a problem that since we have so many participants, volunteers, and activists who are still in Russia, it can be very unsafe for us to be very clear about our attitude towards the arming of Ukraine, the so-called "violent" ways of resistance inside Russia and partisan movements and resistance inside Ukraine.

I personally can say that I am supporting arming Ukraine and I'm standing in solidarity with people in Ukraine who are screaming for help and who've been asking for different kinds of support, defensive weapons, as well as humanitarian aid and weapons to be able to defend themselves. But at the same time, if we write in our manifesto exactly these words, (we support the arming of Ukraine, the partisan movements in Russia) they might be used against us. For example, if somebody from our movement gets arrested in Russia, these exact words in the manifesto can be very dangerous and can be a base for a criminal case for the person. We must be very careful about what language we use in our public documents, and in our statements. Not because we don't have a clear position inside the movement, but, because it's an issue of safety for people who are in great danger. So how we put it in our manifesto is that we are pro-"conscious pacifism", where we understand that defending from military aggression can be nonviolent, which I think is a safer way to put what we really mean. I don't know if that makes sense to you.

**TFSR: So the people that already would be affiliated with this organization in Russia would face criminal cases because calling it a war is criminalized in Russia. Is that correct?**

**L:** Yes, exactly. Any anti-war statement is criminalized in Russia right now. Even naming the war "war" and not "special military operation". Even if you make an anti-war comment or a negative comment to an article about the Russian invasion,

on both sides of the war, for instance, looking in terms of relationship to the military, you can say, look at the Nazis in the Azov Battalion and look at the Nazis in the Russian Imperial Movement or Wagner Group.

It's been nine years of lives lost in the war in the Donbas. And so, I wonder if as a group that has a lot of different perspectives in it, under that umbrella of Feminist Anti-War Resistance, could you talk a little bit about the choice to use the colors that are present on the Ukrainian flag? And also, if you could talk about how the war is having an impact on the rise of nationalism on either side of the border?

**L:** Honestly, we made this logo very quickly. So when we gathered with other participants of the movement and started thinking about our manifest and writing it, it was very spontaneous and quick. And we came up with this, and one of the persons who is an artist and designer came up with the Venus symbol, which is a common feminist symbol, but with a peace sign integrated into it. The group of participants decided that it was a good sign to use. And our designer and artist decided to use this Ukrainian flag color scheme to it. Because back at that time, a lot of people were using these colors on their designs, their logos, and everything.

**TFSR: It's provocative, right?**

**L:** Yeah. I think at that moment, you are not thinking that deeply about "What about the flags themselves as a symbol of states and the nationality?" Again, the conversation about pure thoughts and pure ideological positions, sometimes you don't have the resources, energy, and time to make this super pure ideological decision. I think at that time, it was what we felt was okay to do. And we used this symbol and we used these colors and actually we keep using these colors often in our social media Feminist Anti-War Resistance is using different social media trying to build an independent anti-war grassroots media with feminist anti-war agenda. So, I actually didn't have much time to think about it myself, because I had so much other more important work to do than thinking about our logo and the colors and how it might or might not be problematic or not aligned with my personal anarchist beliefs and my critical position towards any state and towards any predominant national symbols of the countries. For me right now, it's not a priority, I would say, because there are so many other work and ideological questions that had to be worked on that I don't have enough resources for all of them.

I don't know if it is a valid answer to your question, but honestly, I first thought about this subject when you asked me these questions before and I thought, "Oh, well, interesting. What do I think about it?" I just didn't even have time to think about it. And I think most of my colleagues didn't as well.

The only thing I can add, definitely we use these colors not because we are nationalists or have conservative views or beliefs that we are very supportive of any state or any system of national beliefs. But I'm standing in solidarity with

I think for you, it would be very interesting and for your audience maybe to make a podcast with some of these groups and to hear their story and their opinion, because of course I don't want to speak for other people, but I think that sometimes this Western criticism is super unrealistic and inapplicable to the real situation that people in Ukraine and resistance activists in Ukraine are facing right now. Because if we're talking about "let's just not arm Ukraine and let's just not join the military conflict and become a soldier," how should people protect themselves and those they're close to? What should they do if they can't leave the country? If you are, for example, a person who is a certain age, or a certain gender, and you are not allowed to escape the war zone, actually. All this critique was very philosophically pure in some way, but so much unrealistic and so idealistic, which irritated me a lot, and I know it really irritates people in Ukraine. We were talking at the beginning of our conversation about pure thoughts and ideas.

I think this concrete situation and the idea of making pure idealistic actions and being aligned with certain anarchist ideals is completely not applicable in a situation right now. Because if Putin conquers Ukraine, there will be no space for any anarchist thoughts anymore in this territory, because it will be completely under this regime and the level of violence will go higher, it will be genocide. And I think right now the compromise and the ability of anarchists as well to be in alliance with the government for this period when they have to push back the invasion, push back the aggression and violence, this is totally understandable. Because when the violence is over, then there will be a space to confront their own governments, to confront their old nationalism issues, capitalism issues, and all the issues that Ukraine has as a country, as every country has. Right now is the problem of terrible, enormous violence, the death of thousands of people, and the problem that Ukrainian people don't have enough resources to save their lives and defend themselves.

**TFSR: I totally agree. That would be a really interesting conversation to have. And we haven't talked to anyone who is in any of the units that have been absorbed into the Ukrainian military. And I agree that the question of ideological purity gets subsumed by the question of people's ability to survive a circumstance. And these are the discussions that have definitely ripped apart relationships in anarchist communities in the West and created disagreements on this very point. And historically, you can go back to the Ukrainian and Russian revolutions and their relationship with the Bolshevik state, or in Spain, whether the Iron Column should join into the liberal government, or in World War I with Kropotkin versus Malatesta, those two sides of the story... It's a complicated thing is all that I'm getting at. And yeah, I think it's worthy of, it has real implications on people's lives, where we put our support.**

**Could you speak about the color scheme of the logo for Feminist Anti-War Resistance? With the ramping up of nationalism and nationalists**

it's all criminalized right now. And thousands of people got arrested for tiny comments and posts online and for joining peaceful protests. So it's really not safe to openly share your opinion about it. And we are a very visible anti-war organization. There are many anti-war movements in Russia, we are one of them. And we are already under the very serious radar of secret services in Russia, we know that our activists have been followed. Several of our coordinators had criminal cases against them. Our organization has been declared a foreign agent in December. So there's a huge risk for us.

**TFSR: Okay. So to clarify, the conscious pacifist is a position that is known to recognize the right to self-defense for people facing aggression. But if activists in Russia are already facing charges, potentially, if they get found for being a part of an organization that is anti-war, is the concern around being more specific about supporting active resistance by Ukrainian people to being invaded, that'll be just additional charges or that it'll be enough to get the FSB, GRU or whoever to go after you?**

**L:** There are so many new laws and grounds on which you can fix a criminal case against the anti-war person. So our goal is not to make it worse by what we state publicly. And for example, you can get charged for being accused of spreading "fakes" about the Russian army, or you can be called a terrorist or an extremist for being vocal about supporting Ukrainian resistance. So, there is a range of laws that you can violate by having an anti-war or pro-Ukraine position.

That's why we're so careful because there are plenty of these laws and we have to be careful in our statements, because each statement can trigger different laws, and we never know how it will be used, because it's very chaotic right now in Russia. One single person can be charged for the same action under different criminal articles. So it's really complicated and unpredictable. That's why we are so cautious about it.

**TFSR: You've obviously been involved in politics for a while, and you've thought out your positions as an individual, can you talk a little bit about what brought you to join in with organizing with Feminist Anti-War Resistance?**

**L:** I'd been active seven years by that time already, I was involved in organizing feminist protests and I was advocating for LGBTQ+ rights in Russia. I was involved in environmental protests as well. I've been a part of different feminist organizations in Russia for a while. For me joining Feminist Anti-War Resistance and being one of those who started organizing it in the first place was a natural thing to do. Because I can't speak for every feminist in Russia, but most of the activists that I know for all of us, it is completely clear how this escalation of the war is connected to the patriarchy and the state violence that has been going on for 20 years inside Russia.

For me as a feminist being anti-militaristic, being anti-war: it's what feminism is about, because feminism is against violence, hierarchies, against the oppression of all kinds. And this war is a supreme thing of the politics of the Kremlin and Putin for the last 20 years. This is the peak of the violence that has been growing inside the country for years on different levels. And now as a puzzle, it's all been put together and become this full-scale invasion.

**TFSR:** So Russia and other states, other former Soviet bloc states that still coordinate with Russia, such as the so-called Commonwealth of Independent States, have increased systematic repression of LGBTQIA+ people and relationships, as well as further policing of gender under patriarchal rules. And I wonder if you could talk a little bit more because you just brought this up about how resisting the war and resisting patriarchy meshes for you. And maybe you want to give some examples of what you've experienced in Russia in terms of increasing patriarchy.

**L:** For feminist activists and for the LGBTQ+ community in Russia, it's been clear for years that Kremlin, Putin, and his gang think that queerness and feminist agenda equals "Western values". Putin and Kremlin have been standing on this position that Russia and the Russian people have nothing to do with Western values, that we have our own Russian traditional values and we have to stick to them. And basically, we never hear what are these traditions exactly. The only way how they formulated it is by being counter-Western values. And Western values are all the bad things, as they call them, like human rights, women's rights, queer rights and freedom of all kinds, freedom of identity.

So, all these issues have been demonized for years by Russian propaganda and the Russian government in the eyes of Russian citizens. And right now I think it's escalated to the top because around 10 years ago they made this law against so-called "LGBTQ propaganda." I think many people heard about it. And the thing about this law was that if you want to speak publicly about queer issues, you can only do it for an audience over 18 years old, so only for adults. And so it was a bad discriminative law, but still, there was a way for queer organizations and people to be visible, because you just put an 18+ mark on your content, on your events, and announcements, and you can continue what you do.

But last year, they made an update to this law. So now it's basically illegal for everyone to do so-called "LGBTQ propaganda." So you can't speak publicly about queer issues to anyone, anywhere. If you make a public post about queer issues, if you write a text or speak about it at some event, you can be accused of violating this law. This is a terrible discrimination and Russia right now is super unsafe for queer people.

And it's interesting how the focus of the Russian government and Putin himself was so much on trans issues. I don't know where it came from, but for the last couple of years, he and other beneficiaries of the regime were talking so much

an end to the aggression that is causing people to die and be displaced. As people that value human life, we should have a primary focus on stopping this violence immediately and not worrying about the feelings of the Russian state or the NATO Alliance or whatever else. As anarchists, anti-authoritarians, and leftists, we should be stopping the violence. If Ukraine had initiated war by invading parts of Western Russia and decimating cities and destroying water infrastructure, threatening nuclear meltdown by destroying the nuclear power plants, then the correct position for us to take would be to say, "Hey, NATO and Ukraine need to stop this violence, because people in Russia are experiencing harm from it." If the war was going on both sides of that border, then it would be appropriate to say, "Hey, stop both of these nation-states, stop both of these international capitalist alliances, stop all of this war that's causing people harm." That should be the position that we're coming from. And not worrying about balancing international commonwealths of states. States are not the important character in this story that we're telling. It's the human beings that are suffering.

**L:** I agree with you and with the person that you quoted that often in this conversation, the subjectivity of Ukrainian people is being lost, is not being considered by the people who are talking about it, while they're talking about this major power conflicts like West and East and NATO, Russia, etc. More and more I feel that maybe it's even inappropriate to discuss this without Ukrainian people involved because I think it's so damaging and it's so unfair when, for example, me as a Russian citizen, and you as a citizen of the US speaking on the subject of "should we arm or not arm Ukraine? Should Ukraine give up its territories and then maybe Putin will stop?" I think this is a terrible thing because, in this conversation, the subjectivity of the people who are suffering the most is completely lost. And I think it's really interesting.

I don't know if you've spoken to Ukrainian anarchists before, those who are involved in the local resistance movement and military resistance as well. I know, and I've been following through social media and through texts and posts about what was going on in anarchist and leftist movements inside Ukraine and there was also a conflict, as far as I know, inside the anarchist community of how to defend themselves, how to be or not to be a part of this military conflict in this war, because some people from the anarchist community were standing on this non-violent approach. And also there is a very uneasy thing for the anarchist community to be aligned with the governmental structures. And we know that all the independent military groups, which were run by anarchist communities and created by anarchist resistance, are now under the leadership of the state-controlled military institutions because there's no other way to exist in this situation. These anarchist groups got criticized by other anarchists [in Ukraine] and also anarchists from the West, that it is an anti-anarchist position to be in any relationship with the government, especially in a war situation. I personally stand in solidarity with these resistance groups.

the people who were giving these arguments were completely unaware and didn't put any focus on the problem of the imperialistic politics of Russia itself. Somehow these people didn't consider and didn't pay attention that the Russian invasion of Ukraine is very colonial and very imperialistic and that Putin himself has imperialistic ambitions.

He's not interested only in Ukrainian territories. He's looking for going back to the territories of what was before the Soviet Union. He has dictatorship, imperialist, and emperor ambitions, and this is very clear from his actions, his public speeches, and how he talks about other nations, and other countries, not only Ukraine but Baltic and Eastern European countries as well. And I think when we're talking about this war, okay, of course, as anarchists, leftist people, we should be critical about NATO and about Western imperialism and about USA imperialism. And we are critical about it, but we can't say - and that's what I've heard literally from people who consider themselves leftist activists - "that Putin is a lesser evil," which is a completely insane thing for me to say and to think because there is no lesser evil. This is evil like USA imperialism is evil and Putin's imperialism is evil as well. And it all brings us to war conflicts, to the death of people, to colonial politics, to violence on every different level, to daily discrimination of people who are considered as "others" and not "normal".

I think Western activists and leftists should be more aware and put more attention, at least to balance their attention, when they criticize Western imperialistic policies, and when they're speaking about Russian politics and Putin himself. We have to listen to the Ukrainian people. We have to listen to who were the victims of this colonial politics. And we have as well to listen to the voices of indigenous people in national republics inside Russia, who have been also the victims of this colonial and imperialistic politics of the Kremlin for the last 20 years. And even further [back] because Russia has this great history of imperialistic policies and violence towards different ethnicities, countries, nations, indigenous communities.

So I feel that sometimes activists from Russia and activists from Ukraine can't even make a productive conversation with Western activists, because they somehow don't see this side of the problem. I don't know if you can add something to this as a person from the West or not.

**TFSR:** Sure. there was an activist from Ukraine that I spoke to a while ago who was doing mutual aid work inside of Ukraine. This is probably in May of last year. And I brought up a question similar to this and her response was, "People need to stop just thinking about this stuff in terms of international politics." There is very real harm being caused by having bombs dropped on them or military walking through their cities and shooting people, rounding them up. And so, as you say, there's no good side to this, but in terms of NATO and the West in the military-industrial complex or Russian imperialism.

The immediate cause, the immediate thing that needs to happen is

about trans issues, about, again, this "Western weird culture where the West wants to destroy traditional values and they want everybody and children to become trans and that there won't be a regular nuclear family anymore and there won't be mothers and dads, there will be parent 1 and parent 2", all this radical bullshit. And they have been forcing it on the very official level, on the official press conferences and gatherings of deputies and parliament. It was crazy.

So now it is super unsafe for the queer community in Russia. And of course, this is all a part of trying to isolate Russia from the whole world, trying to make Russian citizens brainwashed and make them feel that the whole so-called Western world is a danger to Russia and we have to isolate ourselves because they want to destroy our families, bring weird gender culture to Russia and make everybody queer, make everybody feminist as if it's something bad (as if that's a bad thing, I don't think it is).

So it's been insane. And I think historically we know that this is the policy that happens regularly in authoritarian states. And I think Russia right now is moving fast toward a military dictatorship. So making queer people, making feminists enemies of the state is a very populist way of trying to drive the attention of the citizens away from the real problems, away from the disaster which is happening in Ukraine, away from the deaths of hundreds of thousands of mobilized soldiers, away from the economic collapse and political repressions.

That what's the patriarchal state does often to make these made-up enemies inside the country, to drive attention away. And of course, it's also one of the steps on the way to making Russia a state where there's no chance to protect your human rights because, during the last year, Russia cut off most of its responsibilities towards the international organizations that protect human rights.

So we as a country were out of the European Court of Human Rights and yeah, Russian courts don't follow the decisions of the European court anymore. We are out of the Council of the European Union as well. So there was huge damage to the institutions of human rights defenders in Russia right now.

Maybe later it will go back, of course, when the regime will fall apart, and I hope that it will, and I know that it will fall apart one day. But right now, and I think for many years, Russian citizens won't be protected at all from human rights violations and we can see this escalating day by day.

**TFSR:** In the United States, which is where most of our audience is listening, they're aware that Christian nationalists are using the language of modernity and being anti-modernist to talk about the "perversions that are being pressed on natural people and our children." And so state by state throughout the United States, as well as some federal conservatives, are pushing laws to make, for instance, gender presentation in non-traditional ways, such as drag shows - not drag shows with sexual content, but just people dressing in clothing that is other than what has been assigned to their gender at birth or whatever - trying to make those events adult only

and saying that they are sexual or saying that discussion in schools of the existence of people who are in a same-sex relationship or have same-sex attraction is “gender ideology” and is the imposition of queer values. And so taking that out of schools, state by state, Florida is a good example of this. Similarly, the rollback of rights to access abortion or to the chemicals that are involved in abortion.

This is alongside a movement on the Right for people showing up and beating up people at these events or these spaces too, not to fully compare or say that it’s the same situation in Russia at all. But I think that a lot of people in the US could look at there being an analog between the two situations and what you’re saying about the law was presented 10 years ago that said this content has to be 18+ and then 10 years later it suddenly just gets made illegal.

People in the so-called United States should be able to look at this and say, “Yeah, this traditionalism,” as it’s being called in many places, whether from Dugin or from far-right people in the United States, “has the same goals. And a lot of these politicians are talking to each other and sharing these ideas.” So, different situations, common enemies.

**L:** The conservative turn, we can see it, we can observe it worldwide in many different countries, not only USA and Russia, and it’s really important to understand and not to forget how connected these conservative powers are worldwide.

For example, there were investigations a couple of years ago, which provided information that Russian oligarchs were financing a bunch of conservative political parties and Alt-Right groups worldwide and in the USA as well. And there were millions of dollars spent on supporting these groups because the Russian regime is very interested in making this conservative turn more powerful worldwide. And it’s important to look at who the friends of the Russian regime are right now? Who are the friends of Trump and all the conservative politicians everywhere? For me, as a person who had to flee Russia and come to Europe, for example, it’s crazy how many people I meet who are speaking about Putin in a very tolerant and loyal way, I would say. The amount of conservative people everywhere is insane and it’s growing.

So, I think that we have to put more effort into international, inter-regional, and transnational coalitions and collaborations. I mean the leftist people, anarchists, and anti-militaristic communities. Because now I can see how the Russian regime is making more and more friendships with other dictatorships. Who are friends of Putin? Taliban from Afghanistan, the Iranian government. Actually, the Iranian government provides weapons for Putin and for Russia, and the Russian regime is very interested in reinforcing the Iranian regime. The Russian regime is totally not interested in the women’s revolution in Iran, and sometimes activists from different countries who are against their own regimes in their countries, they’re not that well connected to each other.

ly important to support these people who are trying to slow down the mobilization in Russia because they also don’t have enough resources to do that. These are completely independent organizations. Most of them are grassroots, and they’re doing this as a daily job without getting any pay for this. And this is a hard thing to do for many, many months.

I think for people from other countries, it might also be interesting to look up such organizations and support them, because supporting such organizations are also the way of joining anti-war resistance. Bringing resources to the resistance is also resistance.

**TFSR:** You had brought up before mentioning the chauvinistic pro-Putin positions of some people who are in support of the war. Nationalism, imperialism, and multi’polarity are terms that have complicated the discussion of the war against the people of Ukraine among Western so-called leftists. For instance, this podcast project absolutely supports the right of self-defense against any invading state force of individuals and communities.

But squaring that with the support of another, capitalist state government and the arms industry here in the USA sits on easy, but also war is terrible. People should not be invaded and displaced, but there are a lot of bad faith what-about-isms, this term meaning if you bring up a critique, they counter it immediately without responding to that critique by saying, “Well, what about this?”

These whataboutisms come from apologists for Russian state aggression. For instance, there was recently a failed rally that took place in Washington DC that featured anti-interventionist fascists, as well as Stalin-inspired conspiracy theorists, “anti-imperialists” from the Green Party and the Democratic Party, and Libertarian politicians in what might overall be called a Red-Brown Alliance, rife with Russian chauvinism and flags. So, my understanding is that similar events recently took place in Germany. They probably have taken place in many other parts of the world, but I wonder if you could speak a bit about the use of the tragedy of this war by what Joey Ayoub has called “alt imperialists” and misunderstandings of the issue of anti-imperialism in terms of this conflict, where people maybe say that the imperialist position is always going to be NATO, is always going to be anything aligned with the US or the UK. And there’s no idea that Russia could be acting as an imperial power or an attempted imperial power.

**L:** What I’ve personally experienced when I was discussing the issue of war in Ukraine with leftists from the West, from the USA, from the Western European countries, I had so many conflicts and fights on this subject, because I’ve been hearing a lot “But what about NATO?” “This is the war not between Ukraine and Russia, this is the war between the so-called Eastern world with Russia and the West and NATO and the imperialistic USA.” And in most of these conversations,

who are still in Russia. That is the only way how anti-war resistance can work. You need to have people who are abroad and can do some things from a safer space, and you need to have people who are still inside the country. So I am, daily, contacting different initiatives and initiatives who are fighting mobilizations as well and trying to slow it down. We have several such initiatives that are doing huge work, and again, this is one of the ways of the anti-war resistance movement, trying to slow down the mobilization and trying to help people not to get mobilized. Or to pull out those who already have been conscripted and mobilized and brought to the war zone.

And luckily, still, there are some legal instruments to be able to bring back persons who got mobilized unfairly and by force to the war zone. It's still working, which sounds ridiculous to me, that still some laws are working in Russia. So, with the help of lawyers, with the help of NGOs, and activists, we have several people and families who succeeded in bringing their loved ones back from the war zone, those persons who were brought there by force, not by their own will. And at the same time, there are a large variety of ways to escape mobilizations and these grassroots initiatives and NGOs are providing information to large audiences and also using different partisan ways of spreading this information to educate people, to connect them with local initiatives that can help [people] not to get mobilized, not to get tricked into mobilizing, which also helps a lot.

And we heard stories about how people in the conscriptions offices were told that "Oh, you just signed this bunch of papers and you will go home." And then people realize that they actually signed the papers which may make them obliged to go to the war zone. So, it's a variety of crazy things that were happening. And, because of the lack of education, because of the huge psychological pressure, a lot of people don't know how to react when they get the conscription papers, when they get brought to the conscription office and their relatives don't know how to react. So all these initiatives and NGOs are trying to educate people and provide this information, provide free legal help, and provide consultations.

These activists arranged a series of Telegram bots where every person can in a state of emergency text there, send a short text, and get answers from the lawyers, from the professionals, what to do now, if you are in the war zone already, if you are in a training camp, if you are just standing near the door of the conscription office, what to do. And a lot of people got help.

I think slowing down the mobilization is a very important part of the anti-war struggle because I've heard some ridiculous opinions like, "Oh, those guys who ran from the army are traitors or they are weak." And I think that bringing your body out of this system and escaping the mobilization is also a part of resisting the war because we don't want to make Putin's army stronger. We want to weaken it. If you withdraw yourself as a potential soldier from the system, you are weakening Putin's army, because he wants to make it stronger. And I am very irritated how it's not obvious for many people from the West as well, who were criticizing Russian people who were running abroad from the mobilization. And it's real-

I think we are very good in our struggles inside our countries, but we have a lack of resources to get together and collaborate on the transnational level. And I'm very interested in building these coalitions and collaborations, but it's hard, because there are not enough resources, and these conservatives, have much more resources to be able to reinforce each other and collaborate and make these policies.

**TFSR:** I have a question that relates to the relationship in other countries of conservative movements to the support for Russia. But since we were talking about your status of having to leave Russia, I'd like to talk a little bit about the displacement that this war has caused. One estimate that I've seen about how many people who have moved abroad or escaped as refugees from Russia since the start of the war, which was published in Newsweek magazine, states that by early October 2022, which I guess would be six months into the war, nearly 900,000 people had fled Russia.

And for those of you in the diaspora, how have you experienced conversations about the war with other people who were from Russia? And you've already mentioned that there are still people of Feminist Anti-war Resistance in Russia, but how has it been having this conversation abroad with other people who are of Russian descent or who are also recent emigres?

**L:** It's been very different, because of the Russian opposition and the people who had to flee the country, it is a very diverse crowd. There are people with very strong liberal beliefs with whom I can't agree on many of their views. And some people had to flee the country, but they're still loyal to Putin's regime. Not every person who had to run from the mobilization is against Putin and the war. There were actually people, and we had Russian independent media in exile covering and making interviews with thousands of people who were trying to cross the border from Russia to Georgia. And they were reporting the large number of people who were actually pro-Putin. They just didn't want to get mobilized. And there are so many controversial things happening in people's minds. So it's really hard to say how the whole picture is looking because opinions and political beliefs are very diverse.

I was in many public conflicts with the more liberal opposition of Russia, which is now trying to build oppositional power in exile. And there are mostly white men over 50 who have this strong liberal capitalist beliefs and who are super unaware of the issues of women's rights, different social minorities, and marginalized groups. They are trying to build an alternative for Putin's Russia but based on the same hierarchy, which doesn't make sense to me at all. I think that the problem of Putin's regime is the hierarchy that he has been reinforcing for 20 years.

And this hierarchy, this vertical system of the government, of the regime brought us to this terrible situation of repression and this huge, enormous violence that happened in Ukraine. For me, it's very irritating to look at this liberal opposi-

tion who is trying to make the same hierarchy, but in a different way.

I'm also very critical of the Navalny team because the Navalny team is a really big oppositional power in Russia. Even now when Alexei Navalny is in prison and facing torture, they have a very large audience and they have a lot of resources, but for years, they have been gatekeeping a lot in the oppositional community.

They haven't been that much open to collaborations with youth oppositional groups, grassroots movements, with de-colonial movements in Russia, which are run by people from different social minorities, people from different nationalities, people from national republics of Russia, from indigenous communities. It's really important to underline that in Russia, there are not only Russian people living, not only Slavic people. We have a wide range of nationalities living in Russia.

We have a range of indigenous communities living in Russia. We have national republics that have been fighting for their independence, for their culture, for their autonomy, and subjectivity for years. And there are so many different oppositional communities, but their voices have not been heard well enough, because we have this strong hierarchy and vertical system in the opposition movement.

And I don't know if you wanted to talk about Navalny in the first place, but since I've started this conversation, I have to say that of course right now he's in prison and I stand in solidarity with all political prisoners and I wish him freedom and I am against all that is happening to him right now. But for me as a feminist activist and for many grassroots activists in Russia, it's a very problematic past that he has. If you know that 10 years ago, he was a participant in the right-wing Russian March in Russia. He was in very close relationships with Russian nationalists and alt-right groups. You still can find on YouTube videos where Navalny makes horrible jokes about migrants and how we might have to get rid of them.

He has a very problematic past and even if it was 10 years ago, he was 30 years old 10 years ago. It's really hard for me to say that, oh, he was too young and he didn't know what he was doing. I think he and his team were not vocal enough these days and for the last couple of years about his views on this subject and how he changed or whether he changed. It wasn't enough of this communication. Still, he is represented by the Western media as the leader of the opposition, which is also not true, because so many people have questions about his policies and beliefs and he doesn't represent all the variety of the opposition that we actually have in Russia. So, there are so many tiny things and nuances in this whole thing.

When I actually got abroad, the conversations about it reinforced, because I've been meeting with other anti-war activists, with other representatives of oppositional groups who also relocated. We have been gathering all in different anti-war conferences and we face these more well-known, powerful people from the opposition who were often completely deaf towards our concerns and agenda and our work and what we do and were sometimes not very interested in collaborating and sharing their resources as well.

So, I think it's important to know that the Russian opposition is not a

**that they understand how many people from Russia or from the federations that Russia belongs to are dying in the war? Is this a clear picture for people?**

**L:** The government conceals the real numbers of soldiers from the Russian side who died during the war. And some NGOs and investigators are trying to make these numbers visible. It's hard talking about the number of people in Russia who are aware and who are not aware of such issues. After all, it's impossible to do any social statistics right now in Russia, because, for people, it is not safe to answer the questions sincerely right now.

Because of the level of repression and the level of civilians, the level of anxiety in people is so high right now that you can't just do these reports. You can't make real numbers and figure out how many people are pro-war, how many people are against war, how many people have access to independent media and real information and facts, and how many don't have any access or are not interested. Because, imagine you are a person in Russia and you get stopped on the street or you get a phone call or you get an email where somebody asks you, "Do you have access to the independent media (which are called foreign agents)?" Or, "Are you pro or against war?" You never know who's asking.

Even if you know who is asking you, you never know where this information would leak. And people are afraid to share their real views because people get arrested for anything right now in Russia, anything anti-war. It's very hard for me to talk about numbers, but I know that there are, as in every country, people who are strictly against this war and there are people who are supporting the regime.

In the USA, and in Europe, some people are supporting Putin's regime and are supporting the invasion, same in Russia. I think that the information that I've seen in Western media last year said that like 70% of Russian citizens were pro-war and pro-Putin, I think this is completely wrong because the roots of this information are state propagandist statistics. And the goal of propaganda is to make fake statistics, to make it look like everyone is supporting the regime. So, we can't use this information to talk about the numbers. And I think it's important to understand for people from outside of Russia.

**TFSR: That makes sense. I guess another way of looking at: my understanding is that the draft, like in many countries, hits different economic classes of people differently, but with the continued loss of military and escalation by the Russian military, there's bound to be more attempts to draft the population into military service. I know that one way that the Russian state was able to get around this is by using prisoners and offering them the opportunity to go fight instead of being in prison cells under pain of potential death if they were to try to leave. But I wonder if you've seen an increase in resistance to the draft in various forms, or maybe that's also a thing that's hard to gauge from where you're at.**  
**L:** I am in touch every day with activists

where activists are teaching how to do this partisan resistance. And it's important to understand that they have very precise safety protocols, so none of the humans get hurt during this sabotage. They have been breaking the railways to stop trains with military weapons going to the war zone from Russia and Belarus. At the same time, you might have heard of the protesters and anarchists as well who were setting conscription offices on fire by throwing molotov cocktails inside them. It has also been done during nighttime or during weekends, so nobody actually would get hurt. But the fire will slow the work of the system, of the mobilization, of the conscription offices in general.

So actually I need to add that this resistance is often called "violent" types of resistance, but I completely disagree with that, because I think this is a very conscious way of partisan resistance, where people have a goal not to hurt anybody and still nobody was hurt by it yet. I think calling it a violent resistance is not correct because breaking the railways with war machines is not a violent act, it's just an act of resistance. And putting conscription offices run by the government on fire is also not what I call violence. It might be subjective, but that's what I am very concerned about, especially because some of the political prisoners in Russia can't even be named political prisoners by the international NGOs and human rights organizations, because their actions such as breaking the railways or throwing molotov cocktails are considered as a violent act, which I find very hypocritical. And it's really problematic for these prisoners because the status of a political prisoner gives you more resources, more help, and more legal support. And those brave people who do this way of resistance, often they have lacked this help and resources because they are named violent protesters.

**TFSR:** We actually had a chance to conduct an interview with people from BOAK, the Anarcho-Communist Combat Organization, that does some of the railway sabotage and promotes the destruction of recruitment spaces and such. Amazingly, folks have continued. And as you say, especially in the face of whether people are doing that or even just speaking out or distributing newspapers or leaflets or whatever about the war, people are getting repressed terribly.

I think the reason that international NGOs won't touch that is that all governments agree that property destruction is similar to harming people somehow. It's totally ridiculous.

A year into the war with limitations on the information getting to the populations in Russia as to how many people are dying, under what circumstances in combat or like being attacked, being invaded, being displaced from Ukraine... Since folks in Russia aren't getting all the information and they're being fed propaganda by state-approved media, despite the work that you and other people in the resistance are doing to spread the word and to spread dissent, do you have a sense of what the popularity is inside of Russia of the regime, how the war has been going? Do people have a sense

monolith. There are conflicts and hierarchies and discrimination inside the opposition itself. And I think it's very often not visible to the Western activists, to the Western world.

**TFSR:** I think that's a totally fair point. And maybe people in the West shouldn't be surprised if the picture that they're shown of how the world works just with a man or even a woman in charge and speaking for masses of people... That's not reality and anyone who's listening to the show hopefully has a grasp that one person does not represent a lot of people in reality and the media only has that playbook to play from this one voice. "There are two sides to every story. It's this strong man and maybe this strong woman."

I did say that I'm talking with someone who's from Russia, who's experienced this displacement and this violence of the regime. And we're talking about your experience of what's been going on in this country that you called home for a long time. I just want to also kick back that since we are talking about the war in Ukraine, or that's the impetus for this conversation, estimates of Ukrainian refugees put the number at eight million people moving abroad and about eight million internally displaced, mostly to Ukraine's West away from the front where most of the war is happening.

And I'm not sure where transfers by the Russian military of Ukrainians and in particular Ukrainian children, what the numbers are for that. That's very clear at earlier stages in the war at least when Russian troops cross the border and then started deporting Ukrainians and also putting Ukrainian children into the Russian adoption network. This is a genocidal act meaning to re-educate youth. This is the same thing that you have seen in the United States and in Canada with indigenous communities where the children are taken away from families to be raised or re-educated either in institutional schools or by white families. But the numbers fall through estimates from the Ukrainian state from May 2022 that there was about 150,000 youth that was pulled into the Russian adoption system.

But I just wanted to say that, to put that alongside the fact that this administration in Russia is causing a lot of harm to people that live within its borders, and then here's also what it's doing to people that are suffering the invasion by that military. I don't know if you wanted to say anything about that. I just wanted to make that a statement if nothing else.

**L:** I just can add to this subject that I think the anti-war resistance in Russia right now is very connected to helping Ukrainian people who were displaced, deported, brought by force from the occupied territories to Russia. Because in Russia we have a network of people, it's a completely grassroots network, it's different systems of secret group chats on Telegram, different social media groups where ordinary people, a lot of them don't even identify as an activist, but they are all involved in helping those Ukrainian people who were brought to Russia and put in different

cities and villages and tiny places all over the country. They didn't even have a right to choose where they were going.

Sometimes you can be placed in the middle of Russia, sometimes - in the far north or far east in some tiny cities and the conditions in the places where these people have to be are terrible. And the network of volunteers are the people who provide humanitarian help to these people, they provide medicines, clothes, food, and all the necessity that the families need. And at the same time, most importantly, they help these people to evacuate from Russia and to go to Europe or to go to Europe and go back to Ukraine. I was personally involved in helping Ukrainian refugees for half of the year. I left Russia in March of 2022 after a series of arrests and a criminal case against me. And secret police was after me for the last two years, even before the war escalation. It was the only way for me not to get in jail for years, to flee the country. So when I had fled the country, I went to Estonia and there I joined a grassroots organization that was precisely helping the Ukrainian people who were brought to Russia to cross the Estonian border and go further somewhere.

So, we called them "transitional refugees" because most of them didn't want to stay in Estonia. They went somewhere else to other countries, or some of them really wanted to go back to Ukraine, because they didn't want to leave the occupied territories in the first place and they want to be in their home country. And they were just, through Poland or Lithuania, coming back to Ukraine, to the Western part where it's safer. So thousands of people all over Russia are involved in this underground network of helping these people, housing them, helping them with transportation, documents, all of the tiny things that people who are coming to Russia have no idea how to do.

And it's important to understand that people who were brought from the occupied territories are often very traumatized because these are people who were in the war zone and faced a terrible violent situation. Some of them have been through torture because when you are brought from the occupied territories to Russia, you have to go through a terrible filtration system where the secret services try to investigate and check whether the person who is coming to Russia has any connections to the Ukrainian military or special services or government. And a lot of people were tortured during this filtration process.

People are coming to Russia, they're brought to Russia in a very terrible and vulnerable psychological state, and they have to be taken care of a lot. Volunteers have to be very careful, very caring, and very patient towards these people, it's a lot of work to do. Often people spend months in Russia because they are so tired that they say, "I know that I don't have to stay here and it's not safe for me and not good conditions for me to stay here, but I'm so tired after what I've been through at the occupied territories that I have just no energy, no power to go through this whole journey through the whole country to cross the border and go elsewhere."

And this network of help is a part of the anti-war resistance movement and it is very invisible to people from abroad because of how the liberal media sees resistance, they want to see the picture of people fighting the police with their bare

hands and this is how they see protests. But we've been doing this in Russia street protests for the first couple of months since February 2022 and what were the results? The results were that we had 20,000 people arrested in 2022. We had so many people tortured and faced with police violence and police brutality. We had so many activists who got to prison for being a part of anti-war activity. So, it was obvious that doing street protests in the authoritarian state, when you have hundreds of thousands of armed police, actually the real army inside your own country, whose goal is to shut down every attempt to protest. And when you have only peaceful citizens, unarmed against the fully armed soldiers from special police forces, this is not a productive way of making an anti-war resistance in such circumstances in the authoritarian regime. So the anti-war resistance went to an alternative, more partisan, anonymous way of resisting and helping refugees is one of the ways of anti-war resistance, because this is the work with the consequences of war, and refugees and displaced people are the consequence of the war. So, this work can be considered, in my opinion, an anti-war resistance, because Russia is interested in taking over these Ukrainian people who were displaced. They want them to change their documents to Russian documents. They don't want them to leave the country. They don't want them to be able to move freely. They want them to stay where they are. They don't want them to get any help and to get comfortable. So helping these people, helping them out, helping them with documents, helping them save their identities is a very important part of the resistance.

At the same time, since we've started talking about these ways of resistance, I can just describe which are other ways of resistance that are going on in Russia right now. Some people are trying to fight information propaganda and try to break this informational blockade, which is made by Kremlin, by the authorities, because they're [authorities] hoping that Russian citizens don't get access to independent media, the truthful information about what is really going on. Thousands of people are spreading leaflets with information in public spaces. They're doing anti-war stickers with QR codes leading to the independent press. They are making anti-war graffiti, they're making DIY media.

For example: in Feminist Anti-War Resistance, we are doing a DIY anti-war newspaper, which is called Women's Truth or Zhenskaya Pravda in Russian. This is the newspaper that you can print at home. We have a new issue every two weeks and every person can download this PDF file and print it on their computer and spread it in public spaces, university campuses, post boxes, in public buildings. We have, of course, safety protocols of how to do it safely and anonymously, because if you get caught while spreading this agitation and anti-war information, you can get arrested and you can get a criminal offense for that.

So these are a range of ways how people try to spread information anonymously in a partisan way. And it works really well, I should say because more and more people are getting involved in that. And of course, there is a partisan way of resistance. I think you heard about anarchist partisans of Russia and Belarus who were breaking the railways. And there is a movement called Stop the Wagons,