

Conference “The political uses of the body” ( Korça, Albania, 25/29<sup>th</sup> August 2014)  
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### **Performing Naked Feminism: A Taiwanese Contextualization of the Femen's Body**

« In the beginning, there was the body, feeling of the woman's body, feeling of joy because it is so light and free. Then there was injustice, so sharp that you feel it with your body, it immobilizes the body, hinders its movements, and then you find yourself your body's hostage. And so you turn your body against this injustice, mobilizing every body's cell to struggle against the patriarchy and humiliation. You tell the world: Our God is a Woman!

Our Mission is Protest!

Our Weapon are bare breasts!

And so FEMEN is born and sextremism is set off. » (femen.org)

The statement is clear: the body is the core of Femen's activism. Their movement is a reaction against all forms of alienation of the woman's body. It was originally free, but now it is enchained. This parody of genesis sets the tone of Femen's activism: it is provocative and subversive, with a touch of humor. Anna Hutsol, one of the founders of Femen, declared in 2009 how the Femen had developed a “unique way of civil self-expression based on creativity, courage, humor, efficiency and shock.”<sup>1</sup> However, if this is indeed a good description of the undertaken actions of the Femen, one cannot but feel ill-at-ease while reading the texts which are supposed to provide a more elaborated view of their political stance. Identifying the sex-industry as “the most large-scale and long-term genocide against women” (femen.org) for example, certainly cannot be seen as part of a humoristic strategy anymore. We can read in such formulation the expression of a certain truth claim (the genocide belongs to the regime of international law and supposes a form of universalism) that goes far beyond the mode of actions Femen have chosen in order to face the socio-political injustice imposed on women. With such claims, the rebellious body in action becomes representative of a certain representation of the woman's body as bearer of a universal truth: the oppressive nature of the patriarchal order. Most critiques of the Femen have focused on the use of the topless body for feminist actions, but few have paid serious attention to the role of the text inscribed on the body of the protester. What could be a discursive analysis of the Femen's movement? Is there anything interpretable in the words “Fuck Putin!” or “Fuck the Church!”? It

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1. <http://observers.france24.com/content/20090828-how-they-protest-prostitution-ukraine-femen-sex-tourism>

seems to us that this is where the Femen's political use of the body must be problematized. On the one hand, their actions manifest the desire to break away from a dominant representation of the woman's social role. The breast becomes a weapon and is not identified anymore as a source of pleasure or as a source of nourishment (Yalom, 105). The performative nature of their action is effective in activating a strategy of subjective agency in search of control of its own body. Is this what they mean when they say that their body is politicized through their topless protests? The body is not objectified, because it speaks back and does not subject itself to the desire of the observer. On the other hand, the body of the woman is somehow idealized ("Our God is a woman") and becomes the bearer of a truth, the revolutionary truth of the free women, even if it is vulgar and obscene. To use their own words: "Body-poster is the truth delivered by the body by means of nudity and meanings inscribed on it" (femen.org). The passage from a politicization of the body in action to the inscription of truth on the body of the protester is important because it indicates the point where the body cannot fully speak for itself and needs to be re-articulated in a language which can speak for and about it. Our concern is that this articulation of the body to language, its translation, seems to be largely ignored by the Femen who engage in their actions with a sense of self-certainty associated to the nude truth (or the self-evident truth of the nude). To what extent then is the initial politicization of the body operated by the Femen not limited by their participation in a discursive universalization of the woman as a category? In that perspective, we would like to question the Femen's current tendency to re-appropriate, as "Femen-like," any protest which would make use of the topless body as a form of political expression.

We will first try to provide a contextual understanding of the formation of the Femen in Ukraine. Our goal is not to make the detailed history of this group, but to have a glimpse at the geo-historical conditions of its transnationalization. It is important, because we think that the universalist claims of the Femen should be placed in a post-cold war context in order to evaluate the possible imperialist tendencies underlying their movement. Then, we will come back to overview Femen's actions, and try to shed light on some of the limits of the standardization of the politicization of the body. We wonder if the inclination to perform body politics as a way to attract public attention is not also what keeps Femen's discourse at a level of abstraction where they lose sight of the contextual conditions of the protest. In these both parts, we will refer to the Taiwanese context in order to put into perspective the problem posed by the supposed universalism of the Femen's body politics.

With the establishment of global communities such as the European Union and the United Nations, integration demands the adoption of modern nation-state policies as defined by these communities.

As marginalized non-members, Taiwan and Ukraine share some similarities in the ways they deal with their positions outside international groups. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the lift of martial law in Taiwan in 1987 promised new freedoms for Ukrainian and Taiwanese citizens. However in the states' attempts to become part of global communities, both countries have formed coalitions with locally based, "Western" influenced NGOs to rapidly harmonize with 'non-negotiable standards and obligations.'

Taiwan, as criticized by Taiwanese scholar and activist, Josephine Ho, benefited greatly from locally based Christian NGOs that had achieved some international recognition, such as the Catholic Good Shepherd Sisters, Garden of Hope, Rainbow Project Center and End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism. As these groups participated in international conferences, not only did they create networks where information could be shared and credibility gained, but also provide Taiwanese officials with the opportunity to participate and increase Taiwan's international visibility<sup>2</sup>. Further down its path towards inclusion, Taiwan's continued compliance with the standards set by the UN led to an important change regarding child protection laws in 2003<sup>3</sup>. . What this created was an increased censorship scheme led by the conservative Christian groups in order to further cleanse Taiwan of 'inappropriate' sexual material. This new law ensured that minors could no longer access any kind of sexually explicit material, including mangas and the internet. As a result, gay and lesbian teens were also deprived of information hubs that had previously been used to learn more about their sexuality (Ho, Queer 542-3). Under the banner of child protection, Christian NGOs in coalition with the media, marginalized sexuality by posing it as a threat to innocent children. These groups now specializing in child protection programs were able to maneuver state laws regarding sexual acts and information on deviant sexualities through their achieved international recognition, which now somehow had branded them as the spokesperson for international standards.

At the par with children protection, human trafficking also became a key element in Taiwan's harmonization process. During the 1980s, another Christian group (Presbyterian Church of Taiwan) decided to take up the cause as they became aware of aboriginal girls being sold into prostitution (Ho, Anti-Trafficking 84). Projects were developed, and marches were staged. However, their initial focus, anti-trafficking of child prostitutes, shifted towards fighting the gendered oppression of girls by "immoral men" and somehow finally evolved into the "total abolition of sex work" (Ho, Anti-Trafficking 88-9). In the 1990s, "embarrassed to find itself listed among economically and

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2. As was the case of the official who participated in the ECPAT World Congress in Yokohama in 2001 (Ho, Queer 548-9)

3. The reform of two Welfare Acts, previously differentiating between minors below 12 and those between 12 and 18, now stipulated that all those under 18 years of age would be considered minors (cf. Ho, Queer 542)

politically ‘backward’ countries...Taiwan government scrambled to improve its image and international reputation, thus creating a new window of opportunity for the legislative efforts launched by anti-child-prostitution groups” (Ho, Anti-Trafficking 88). Taiwanese NGOs took advantage of Taiwan’s shame in order to continue their rampant enterprise to further marginalize sexuality in the name of child protection. What ensued was yet another transformation of laws. Heavy penalizations would befall all those involved and those related to those involved with “any kind of obscene contact,” regardless of whether it had been done at home or abroad (Ho, Anti-Trafficking 89, 93, 97). Paradoxically, despite these hyperbolic actions to thwart human trafficking, the trafficking of migrant labor from Southeast Asian countries “is being conducted on a much larger scale than ever imagined” (Ho, Anti-Trafficking 97). Thus showing that Taiwanese overly exclusive anti-human trafficking laws fail to consider other kinds of human trafficking that go unnoticed by local Christian NGOs. The NGOs limited focus towards the complete abolition of all matters categorized as ‘obscene’ has taken the fore, and has thus marginalized sexualities, erased ‘saved’ subjects agencies and negated the emergence of other subjectivities.

Under similar circumstances with Taiwan, Ukraine has also battled its non-inclusion to the EU through the use of NGOs. During the late 1990s, right wing Ukrainian politicians pushed for anti-human trafficking and anti-domestic violence laws, in compliance with the “international pressure...to address its worsening human rights record” (Hrycak, Orange 163). Laws were eventually passed in 1999 and 2001 respectively. However, the state did very little to implement them, and the promise of support crisis centers and shelters were left in the hands of Western groups and municipal authorities which had already been managing them long before the law was passed (Hrycak, Orange 164). It wasn’t until after the Orange Revolution and the election of “Western-leaning” President Yushchenko that shelters, help hotlines and a variety of services to help victims of domestic violence were increased (Hrycak, Orange 164). Cooperation between women’s groups and the state further strengthened as the state sought the advice of these “on how to further harmonize Ukrainian and EU policies” regarding gender equality (Hrycak, Orange 164). Like Taiwan, Ukraine dealt mostly with “Western-influenced” groups in their discussion regarding these issues, since the set of issues grassroots groups focused on did not attract the attention of foreign investors and were not at par with the EU’s interests<sup>4</sup>.

Similarly to the Taiwanese interest regarding human trafficking, Ukraine also became interested by this issue. However before we move on to this, it is important to first take a look at some of the

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4. For more information on Ukrainian grassroots groups, see Hrycak in “Foundation Feminism and the Articulation of Hybrid Feminisms in Post-Socialist Ukraine.”

consequences the introduction of the Western market economy into Ukraine has had on gendered roles and the family structure. First of all, “the coming of market capitalism to postsocialist Ukraine has meant the expulsion of women from the workforce and...now a career housewife by default” (Zhurzhenko, quoted in Solari 24). What this meant was a successful redefinition of the roles each member played in the family. The family deviated away from the traditional Ukrainian extended structure towards a modern European nuclear structure. Grandparents who used to take care of their grandchildren are now left with nothing to do, since the recently ousted working mother has become the housewife, and the father, who used to share the economic burden with his wife, is now considered the sole breadwinner of the family (Solari 24). In many cases, because the salary of only one member is not enough to support a whole family, many women, especially grandmothers, go abroad to find work and eventually become “undocumented domestic workers” (Solari 29, Hrycak, Women 49). “This migration in turn supports the Ukrainian nation-building project, and becoming ‘Europe’ (a move toward the capitalist market and prosperity) rather than ‘Africa’ (no market and poverty)” (Solari 29). In other words, because the nuclear family structure is impossible under the living conditions in Ukraine, these migrant grandmothers in sending their salaries back home reinforce the implementation of the nuclear family, and the extinction of the traditional Soviet extended family. Furthermore, because of the increased Western attention placed on sex trafficking, and its mission to eradicate it, it was made very difficult for young Ukrainians to obtain tourist visas for Western countries. And because Western representations of trafficked victims mostly depicted women as sex-trafficked prostitutes, migrant women workers were stigmatized under this light (Hrycak, Women 49). Of course, these hyperbolic reports did not take into account that a large percentage of migrant women were actually working as domestic workers in European countries, such as Italy<sup>5</sup>.

Unlike Taiwan, where conservative Christian groups have established a strong voice regarding women’s issues, Ukrainian women’s NGOs either lack financial support or public interest. The pressure from abroad to focus on a pre-given women’s rights agenda affects groups seeking foreign investors. It leaves them unsupported by local women, and although coalitions with more popular maternalist grassroots groups would benefit both sides greatly, they are not established (Zychowicz, Kim). By looking at how the state has dealt with women issues in Ukraine, and how its path towards harmonization has led to the marginalization of women workers, the implementation of the

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5. In her article Solari talks about the mixed emotions women migrant workers have as they return to their “European Ukraine.” As their actions contribute to the development of “European Ukraine,” the real state of affairs reveals that Ukraine has a long way to go in its development, and that at the moment it may look more like Africa, “the forgotten underbelly of globalization” (28). These migrant women not only have been stigmatized by the implementation of anti-trafficking laws and the misrepresentation of migrant labor as prostitutes on account of Ukraine’s harmonization process, but have also been put in a position which supports this system that marginalizes them.

traditional woman's role as housewife, the lack of female participation in the state, the state's limited cooperation with women's NGOs and the unchallenged gender inequality, we can see how a new style of activism could emerge from these circumstances. In 2008, Femen, a protest group which meant to point out the lack of attention women's issues receive in Ukraine, sought to uncover the actual role women play in society and raise awareness on the multiple problems within Ukraine through their protests. Their actions were witty, provocative and clear. However they later employed forms of organization and focus endemic to international NGOs, such as global women's rights and anti-prostitution, while at the same time distancing themselves from other feminists and NGOs in order to prove their inefficiencies in dealing with gender equality. If they are able to directly show the ever looming presence of the 'patriarchy' through their protests, then their actions are justified and dialogue is pointless, since other groups have not achieved complete equality and there is still work to be done.

During their first years of organization (2008-2010), Femen, recognized as "bizarre street theatre" (Rubchak 17), tackled a wide range of issues: political prostitution and populism during the 2010 election campaigns, sexual harassment in universities, lack of female politicians and freedom of the press in 2010, public stress over the H1N1 flu epidemic in 2009, among many more (flicker.com). They have shown creativity when staging their diverse performances, such as mimicking police beating the press, fabricating underwear from hygienic face masks, or female university students getting 'spanked' by professors. Initially they had plans to become the first all female political party in Ukraine. However those plans were discarded when some of the leading members had to leave the country and seek refuge in Paris (femen.org). Femen now is but a shadow of what it used to be. Not only have they become a transnational group with branches in several countries in Europe and America, their protests have been reduced more and more to the simplistic, yet seemingly provocative act of exposing their breasts in opposition to patriarchal representations, namely prostitution, dictatorship and religion (femen.org). Their demand to have political and religious 'dictators' assume individual responsibilities for the multiple oppressive actions taken on women calls for individualized short-term solutions that do not question the system which has created them. Femen's passive aggressive tactics reinforce Jasbir Puar's rewording of Derek Gregory's analysis of "imagined geographies": "certain desired truths become lived truths, as if they were truths, thus producing material traces and evidences of these truths, despite what counter-evidence may exist" (39). In other words, by staging passive aggressive street performances Femen not only reinforces its claims of the oppressed and victimized role of women in society, but also proves how its "desired truths" are lived and exposed in male police officers, priests and bystanders' conducts. As

they run around bellowing their protest chants and wriggling away from the clutches of the police and bystanders, they make sure that cameras are on site and whatever happens is recorded in some kind of way. In this manner Femen activists overlook the visual and verbal provocation they use, namely their nakedness and use of ‘obscene’ language, to excite these figures. In the end “they produce the effect that they name and describe” (Puar 39). This interpretation of ‘imagined geographies’ accurately illustrates the Femen’s claims on the oppressive nature of the patriarchy on all women. Nevertheless Femen has learned firsthand that one of the most effective ways to become influential is by being internationally recognized, as Ukraine has shown in its harmonization process with the EU. Refusing to engage in dialogue with politicians, legislative bodies and other women activists, Femen focuses more on influencing women directly through their actions<sup>6</sup>. It cannot however be simply identified to a new form of “consciousness raising”.

It is to our understanding that Femen, as a now branded transnational organization, mimics tactics used by existing global communities. Through their discourse of “Sextremism,” they have established what freedom embodies (secular unoppressed nakedness), they have exported their policies to other countries without first establishing a space for dialogue and contextual adjustment, and they have marginalized groups that do not comply with their policies, thus stripping them of agency and reducing them to victims in the need of rescuing (Christian and particularly Islamic women)<sup>7</sup>. On that account, Femen’s messages can easily be misinterpreted or misunderstood, and seen as neocolonial, Islamophobic, and indifferent to other countries’ histories and feminist tendencies. Though it can be said that Femen has given some space for their branches to decide which local issues to tackle, they will still revolve around the three key issues that have been established already by its headquarters in Paris. Their drive towards exposing the dilemmas of apparent gender equality reflects the lack of attention gender related topics have received in Ukraine and the form international NGOs have adopted to influence local NGOs. Therefore their affirmation of momentarily provoked outbursts of ‘patriarchal’ sentiments serve as evidence that fuels their “imagined geographies,” with which they can justify that Ukraine is not the only country where gender inequality exists.

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6. In contrast to the Femen’s global politics, next door neighbor Russian punk rock band Pussy Riot recognizes that discourse cannot be taken from place to place without first being molded into the context of that new place. Therefore groups who employ this kind of method become unimportant and unrecognizable to people of that place (Pussy Riot Interview). Because of their lack of dialogue with other women and feminist groups, Femen has been extensively criticized for their limited views on global feminism and global women’s rights.

7. About Femen's position regarding Islam, the chapter “Naked rather than in Niqab” in *Femen by Femen* sets the tone: they denounce the “barbarians” in Turkey, the “savagery” (to cover girls at 6 years old) in Afghanistan, or proclaim in Paris “Islamist=sadist”. There is a clear affirmation of the necessity to free the Muslim women (“Get undressed” and you’ll be free...).

Can we consider then that harmonization processes, as those witnessed in Taiwan and Ukraine, can be reflected on the types of internationally visible women's activist groups that arise in that country? In Taiwan there is the emergence of Western-recognized conservative child-protecting Christian groups and in Ukraine, topless secular transnational feminists. Is it also possible to consider whether criticism of global communities can be made through the discourses of such said women activists, since they reproduce by-products of global communities?

Because of the existence of multiple economic and political differences between Taiwan and Ukraine, this comparison of course has its limitations. And though it is strange to draw a parallel between Taiwanese Christian NGOs and the secular anti-women's oppression Femen, we can say that these groups' origins both lay in marginalized countries. While Ukraine, located at the border of Europe, is marginalized economically from the benefits shared by members of the EU, Taiwan faces political marginalization from the UN and remains unacknowledged by most countries. In comparison to Taiwan, because Ukraine is already a member of the UN, it can be said that the influence NGOs would have on the nation-building process would remain limited. And while international pressure can still influence Ukraine's policies on human trafficking violations and gender inequality, its already implemented laws legally justify the state's responsibility regarding these issues. Even though they are not being enforced.

Furthermore, if we were to take into consideration the export and import of migrant labor, we will see that a rather complicated set of issues is at work in Ukraine and Taiwan. The Ukrainian exportation of labor not only positions the state in the context of the "African," third-world imaginary, but also renders these actions necessary for its own EU harmonization. These methods not only benefit Ukraine, but also the laborers' host country as well. On the other hand, Taiwan embodies the "European" imaginary, similarly to Italy, by importing migrant labor that not only encompasses the caretaking of its growing elderly population, but also the necessary cheap labor needed in manufacturing. The differences portrayed by the direction of labor migration, both indicate the economic and political situations of both countries. As an extension to Josephine Ho's argument on global governance and the above comparison between Taiwan and Ukraine, there is a higher probability for internationally sanctioned conservative groups to maneuver the nation-state building process of politically marginalized countries seeking inclusion into global communities. While simplistic protest groups like the Femen are more viably applied in countries that have already established their presence as global players. With that said we believe that, because Taiwanese conservative groups have made their mark and have strongly rooted themselves in Taiwanese politics, it would be hard for the Femen to be introduced into this sphere.

We first wanted to locate the politicized body of the Femen in the post-cold war mapping of the world because it indicates the conditions of their strategy of globalization. We believe that the Femen's use of the body is a product of these global conditions, and that it is first meant to counteract their negative effects on women's lives. To what extent can the Femen's political use of the topless body effectively alter these conditions, or the way we perceive them? This is what we will deal with in this second part.

The topless or nude body has been used as a political instrument of expression in different places and for diverse purposes. Femen's topless protest is sometimes associated to the "slut walks" or to the "bra burning" movement of the 60's. But this last reference is sometimes used only to criticize their action, to say that "this has already been done." Actually it has been done all throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1929 Nigerian women protested topless to denounce the rule of a colonial administration that had authorized the exploitation of their land. More recently, in 2004 in Northeast India, a group of women staged a naked protest after the torture, rape and murder of a young woman, Thangjam Manorama, while she was in custody in an Indian's Army Battalion. In 2011, topless South-Korean sex workers took to the streets and faced the police crackdown on brothels. The topless tactic has also been used by the group Peta in the last ten years, to defend animal rights and vegetarianism. We could also mention the example of the American group of the nude activists (equal topless rights for all) that protested in 2012 for the equal rights to be topless in public.

These actions are unrelated to each other and to the Femen. The only link is the tactical use of the topless body. We don't know if the Femen is inspired by these examples. We can only speculate that they would probably express solidarity to some of these movements. We don't intend to provide an exhaustive list of topless protests, or to make a comparison between these diverse protests and analyze their relations. We would just like to note that the topless body has been used in political demonstrations all over the globe and for a long period of time. However, the number of examples may have increased in the last couple of years. Is the Femen partly responsible for this development? New groups have also emerged to counter Femen's ideas by mimicking their tactics. This is the case of "Putin's Army" in Russia, a group of beautiful young women who will "tear it up for Putin." We could also take the example of the "Homen" in France who protest topless in opposition to same sex marriage. However, we believe that what is important regarding Femen's impact is not so much the increasing quantity of topless actions, but their increasing visibility. What we would like to question is the Femen's growing referentiality regarding all topless actions. This tendency to impose itself as a kind of hegemonic referentiality certainly follows from their success. But we want to understand the possible problems posed by such appropriation of the protesting

topless body by the Femen.

When we looked at the situation in Taiwan, we encountered three protests in which the naked or topless body was concerned. In 2006, twenty years after the Chernobyl incident, a group of twenty people launched a naked protest against the construction of a fourth power plant on the island. In 2011, the action was reiterated. The nude form was part of a game with words: “better nude than nuke” (in Chinese : \_\_\_\_\_, ningluobuhe). These actions are part of a more general social movement against the development of nuclear energy in Taiwan. It is unrelated to a feminist claim, or to the Femen's movement. Femen also protested in 2011 at the limit of Chernobyl's exclusion zone in order to pay homage to the people who died following the incident of 1986. But in this case, it is not articulated to a localized social movement. Another example of naked protest in Taiwan occurred after the gay pride parade, when a group called “Oh my gay” made a clear statement to address the problems encountered by the gay community because of the anti-obscenity laws mentioned earlier in this article. This example differs radically from the Femen's practice, because it was addressed mostly to the gay movement itself, and it was staged in such a way that nudity was meant to make people listen to the clear and detailed statement this group had prepared. The purpose was to remind the gay community of Taiwan that the main issue to be addressed was maybe not so much same sex marriage or the right to hold a gay pride parade. We can see that the naked body has a different function in the Taiwanese instances. Another example took place recently during the student protest against the extension of the commercial agreement between Taiwan and China; a group of four women staged a topless action within the demonstration. On their bodies were written the characters “\_\_\_\_\_” (wobufu, “I don't serve”), to criticize what they identify as the sale of the Taiwanese nation to the Chinese State. Here, we can interpret the use of the topless body as a return to the familiar association of the body of the woman with the nation<sup>8</sup>. Our point here is not to define a Taiwanese use of the nude or topless body in protest, but rather to show that this mode of political expression is based on a local context and to specific circumstances. They are part of more general social movements within Taiwan, and they don't proceed to institutionalize “toplessness” in protests. By contrast, we can see that Femen's use of the body is meant to spread itself in a more uniform way to deal with a wide range of issues. In short, it consists in a kind of standardization of the body of the protester which makes some people question Femen's obsession with the woman's breast, when other parts of the body can also be used. We previously suggested that the lack of interest for Femen's action in Taiwan could be related to the power that the NGOs acquired in the context of the formation of the Nation-State. Now, the

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8. Though we didn't have the possibility to communicate with the students who organized this action, it seems to us that, even though they shared some common features with the Femen's mode of operation, their action remains grounded in a nationalist agenda which differs from Femen's transnational perspective.

examples we took from the Taiwanese context lead us to think that it can also be understood from the perspective of the abstraction from contextual determinations which characterizes Femen's performances. What is at stake is the limit of Femen's performative strategy.

The use of the topless body in protests is not new, but the specificity of Femen regarding the topless action is that it has become their signature. The topless action became part of a marketing strategy through which the group could secure their international recognition. The topless body became a "label." However, we should still maintain a difference between the strategy of development of the organization and the tactical use of the topless body in the action itself. In the moment of the protest, the topless body is first used to produce a disturbance in the common perception of the genderized differentiation between public and private space. What is supposed to be part of the privacy of the woman, her breast, is exposed to the public attention. It challenges the representations of the respectable mode of participation of the woman in the public sphere. The sexualization of the protest is meant to attract the public gaze, but also to stage the mechanism of domination of the woman's body by the male's gaze (and the woman's possible complicity in such mechanism). In the theatrical performances of the Femen, there is indeed a will to operate a form of distancing between the observer and their representation of the normal social order. They want to disrupt the peace of the passive civil spectator. They are calling for a reaction, and it is this which will at the end justify their mode of action. They want to irritate people because, according to them, then the "masks fall" and people would express their true positions regarding equality and social justice between genders. If they are arrested, it "shows" the level of democracy and of freedom of speech of a country. It seems to us that the initial burlesque and parodic nature of the performance is somehow put into question by such desire to reveal the truth of a socio-political situation. What was first a performative game with our representations and the illusions which constitute them (playing with the fake and social appearances), claims itself as the incarnation of a truth that calls up the martyr figure<sup>9</sup>. Our point is not to say that Femen actually contributes in the reproduction of a patriarchal order, but to understand when the reasons behind Femen's actions get lost, and why it makes some people think that they blindly follow an imperialist agenda. It is in that perspective that we can also situate the critiques of the Femen considering that they are more interested by media coverage than by the actual uplifting of the social status of women.

In fact, the problem lies not so much in this desire for public attention. It is indeed normal for a protest to be willing to attract a maximum of publicity. It would be somehow paradoxical to criticize Femen's efficiency on that level. It only gets confusing when we consider the wide range of issues they are dealing with. Questions about what is going on behind the stage are raised, and by

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9. Inna Shevchenko writes in *Femen by Femen* : " I might end up my days somewhere in Iraq or Iran, butchered by a fanatic mob." (*Femen by Femen*, 162)

way of consequence, the actual issues that the performances are supposed to disclose are put on the side. This could be interpreted in relation to the problematic participation of the Femen in the mediatic flow. But we would rather like to consider it as a consequence of the emphasis the Femen places on the theatricality of the protest. In other words, we interpret it as an outcome of the choice for a performative mode of action at the expense of a reflexion on the contextualization of the issue at stake. The Femen demonstrate their creativity and originality in the staging of their protest, that is to say in their theatrical mode of intervention. They put a lot of thought and energy in the costumes they wear (nurses, nuns, maids, etc...) and in their choreography (anti-fascist demonstrations before the last European elections) as much as in the coordination of the good moment and good place to strike (facing the political representatives in G8, interventions during the “Eropolis” show). This is the reason why they could appear to bystanders more as stage performers than protesters. The topless body is the central element of the action. In the act of performing, it becomes the universal referent for the (de-)contextualization of the protest. It is more than a simple signature of the Femen's group. It presents itself as a possible answer to diverse issues, and as a relevant political stance in all kinds of situations. It is as if the topless body, the breast as “weapon,” could be transposed to any place and appear at any time to disclose an identical and global meaning: the liberation of the woman. This makes sense if you consider the topless body within the economy of Femen's narrative. But it also limits the contextual understanding of the protest to the moment of performance itself. Therefore, the local social context of the problem tends to be excluded from the Femen's picture. In short, the topless body is a source of strength for the activist but also a form of self-enclosure of this same activist within the limits of her action.

Our goal is not to criticize Femen's actions as such, but to hint at the problem posed by what tends to be action for the sake of action. We have been struck by the fact that the Femen have a tendency to contrast their sextremism with a supposed “classical feminism” defined as a more theoretical approach on women's issues. This opposition between practice and theory can be understood as a reaction to the so-called real feminist critics of Femen's activism. Femen's self-definition as the warriors of feminism is a way to answer these critiques. It indicates what their specific function is. The classical form of feminism acts in conference halls and in boring books and articles, and so is considered as obsolete and inefficient for the Femen, because it cannot get out of the academic world. This positioning of Femen's role against a conventional form of feminism marks the distance Femen has with the academic world<sup>10</sup>. In that sense, it potentially opens up a space for a new reflection on the formation of an academic field constituted around the woman as an object of study and the historicity of the gender category reproduced by this academic world. However, Femen's

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10. It can be interpreted from the context of the feminist question in Ukraine (lack of a feminist field or even of feminism in general after the communist time according to Jeffrey Goldfard)

positioning doesn't really put into question the universalism constitutive of the disciplinarization of feminism. It actually re-implements it in the oppositional logic which provides the frame for the self-definition of their actions: Women (Femen) against patriarchal order, against dictatorship, against religion, against prostitution identified as enslavement and genocide of women. These kind of simplistic binary oppositions are the principles incarnated by the topless body of the protester in action. The universalism of feminism as the global struggle for women's rights is re-instituted. It is re-articulated in and on the provocative body of the protester who then participates in the reproduction of the global imaginary and therefore to the hierarchy which informs such imaginary (Europe/Africa).

The meanings behind Femen's actions are supposed to be revealed by the slogans inscribed on their bodies. But the problem is that they often get completely unreadable in their performance. And if they do draw the attention of the public, they appear equivocal or simplistic (“Jesus is an aborted kid,” “No demand, no offer,” “My womb is sacred,” etc...). A slogan in a protest is certainly not meant to present a detailed analysis. It is used to strike at a point of contention. We do not propose to interpret Femen's slogans or to criticize Femen's lack of perspective on such basis. What seems to us more problematic is that by inscribing these slogans on the topless body of the protester without engaging in parallel discussions, the Femen's initial politicization of the body might turn into a simple moral gesture, as if the act and the body involved in it would speak for themselves and wouldn't need to engage in a discussion with divergent positions. On their website, Femen explains in short paragraphs the reasons behind their interventions in different locations, but they seem to refuse to engage in a debate with groups with different positions on the issues they want to tackle<sup>11</sup>. They don't discuss with sex workers, they simulate the brothel and criminalize the customer; they don't discuss with Muslim women, they burn the Salafist flag in front of the Mosque of Paris. The politics of the “Fuck you!” constitutes the expression of certainty that Femen occupy the rightful position. In both the cases of the sex-workers and the Muslim women, Femen remain trapped within a model of binary oppositions in which the agency of the woman becomes essentially subjected to the existing relations of domination. They don't consider how new subjectivities can emerge from the complexity of social interactions, as it is the case when sex-workers actively displace the matter at stake on the level of working conditions, rather than keeping it on a moral ground. This is the reason why, ironically, Femen's stand on prostitution for example, can reinforce the position of conservative groups on such issue, as our comparison with the Taiwanese instance is supposed to

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11. On April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2014 a group of six Chinese women (Hawthorne Sisters Student Alliance) staged a topless protest at the entrance of the Guangdong University of Technology against sexual discrimination. A few days later we posted it on the Femen's previous facebook account asking their opinion. There was none whatsoever. Also groups such as Muslim Women Against Femen and Feminists Against Femen have discussed the Femen on their pages, without receiving any responses.

indicate.

To conclude, we have to stress that our critical understanding of Femen's politicization of the body does not lead us to make a choice between the pro/anti-Femen camp. Neither do we want to neutralize the ideological contradictions characterized by such split. We wanted to show that in their rapid development, the Femen have lost part of their capacity to produce new meanings and new subjectivities through the politicization of the body. The standardization of the topless body seems to be articulated to the global condition produced by the global mode of governmentality regulated by the NGO systematization. We indicated the exclusionary dimension of Femen's strategy, by trying to show how we can interpret it within the performative logic of their mode of actions. Regarding the more general question of the political use of the body, our analysis sheds light on the importance of the global contextualization of the body in action. We have seen indeed how Femen's desires for women's rights are bound to a geo-political imaginary mapping of the world rooted in the Ukrainian's marginal situation in Europe. We also hope that this paper might help us to raise questions about the performativity of the body regarding political expression. The possible self-enclosure of the Femen within the performative role of warrior at the expense of a relocalization of their protestations appeared to us as one major difficulty in what we would like to call the translation of their body politics.

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