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Russia Celebrates Misogyny, Not Equality on Women's Day

In Russia, a woman is necessary only to serve or to decorate something — or to receive threats if she ventures beyond these boundaries.

By Zalina Marshenkulova

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A participant in a rally for women's solidarity and women's rights, organized by the group of activists We Are the Khachaturyan Sisters to mark International Women's Day in Moscow's Sokolniki Park. **Sergei Fadeichev / TASS**

Ignoring women, general misogyny and sympathy for the aggressor, not the victim: this is what it means to live in a patriarchal society.

For the last few weeks I've been afraid to move around the city on my own and afraid for my life, because recently I received the now customary round of threats to kill and dismember me — and what do you think for? Simply for calling on men not to beat or incite violence against

women.

It all began when in my blog I defended some girls who appeared in a video by cult German rock band Rammstein. They began to receive death threats after links to their pages were posted in the Dvach online group. The actresses even deleted their social media accounts after the threats and bullying began.

Just think, this has been going on for years. These people just put the details of whatever girls they want on this platform, or on those of extremist organizations such as *Muzhskoye Gosudarstvo* (Male State) or in ubiquitous online groups and begin to bully them by writing insults, death wishes and specific death threats. And everyone reacts to this as if that's the way things should be. That is — they don't react at all. Silence. Quiet. Mute accord.

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Dvach, which regularly posts content like that, has almost 500,000 subscribers on Telegram. Let that sink in. So can we say that it's only small "fringe groups" that have such negative attitudes toward women in Russia? No, I don't think we can.

Does Russian society understand that a woman is not a piece of meat, not a national commodity and not somebody's property? Do they understand that a woman is a free individual of equal standing to a man and can do with her body whatever she deems necessary? No, it doesn't, so "content" and persecution like this is quietly flourishing.

A woman is invisible and is necessary only to serve or to decorate something — or to receive threats if she ventures beyond the boundaries set for her.

For three years already I've been receiving insults and harassment for simply trying to convey to people that a woman is an individual, not a national commodity. So it's not just this latest story that is passing almost unnoticed.

It's like with the football World Cup, when girls were bullied for having sex with foreign fans. Articles came out on the sites of large media outlets with headlines like: "Look at these whores! Going around with foreigners."

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What kind of equality can we be talking about if even the media allow themselves to publish material like this? Or if a representative of the Russian Orthodox Church announces to the whole country that all women are prostitutes, and then a week later also tells the whole country that girls don't need education?

What reactions do we usually see from men and women?

In my case, it doesn't bother anyone that nobody will open an investigation into my story, but will merely utter instead the traditional "Come to us when they kill somebody."

Others don't react at all and stand silently by — because in Russia the life of a woman is worthless. Yes, many will say that the life of a person here is worthless, but the life of a woman even more so.

Ultimately, you find yourself face-to-face with a vast, rotten system in which men control power and resources – and they couldn't care less whether some women are branded a whore and receive death threats on a daily basis – since the chances are that "she deserved it."

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So the issue here is not even that women need to be represented in government at last and that they should have real power – or even that women are paid 30% less. We are still at the level of attempting to prove that a woman is equal to a man, that she should not and is not obliged to walk around with a bag on her head.

We know that it is not men we need to fight, but male gender socialization – we need to fight this rotten system of social conditioning. Although in schools they also still teach pupils about homebuilding and the "religious" foundations of family happiness, where the man is master and can do whatever he wants with his wife, and she is obliged to hold her tongue.

We know that it is men who carry out violence, not because of biology, but for social reasons.

But instead of making changes to education and culture, and educating people beyond gender stereotypes, they persecute the only ones who bring enlightenment to the masses (feminists). Since there are almost no women in government, and those that are have no real power – nobody is going to help those invisible and inconspicuous women in need. Though there are more than 70 million of us.

So that's the March 8 I give you, a "festival of spring, beauty and femininity," as they love to write on Russian greetings cards, but no equality whatsoever. A celebration for women who are convenient to men.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

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