

# **This is NOT a love story!**

**LoveKills, punk and the first 20 years of anarcha-feminism in Romania**

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The historical context in Romania makes it so that the pre-communist literature and anarchist activity, which is quite prolific<sup>1</sup>, has remained largely unknown. The repressive national-communist regime either drove out the anarchists or silenced them, so that it was only in the early 1990s that an anarchist movement began to coagulate again, thanks to the punk scene. Internationally, punk rock emerged in the 1970s. In Romania, the punk scene developed in the 1990s, especially in Craiova and Timișoara, influenced by relations with the former Yugoslavia (especially Serbia). Punk groups and movements have existed since the 1980s, for example in more isolated areas on the outskirts of Timișoara<sup>2</sup>.

The affinity between anarchism and punk is not a coincidence, they have in common certain principles that led to the formation of the musical-political hybrid called "anarcho-punk". Rebellion, Do It Yourself (DIY) ethics, economic and social self-organization, or the contestation of authority are political and militant principles that define the anarcho-punk movement.

The work of anarchist "propaganda" carried out by the first post-communist groups through publications such as *Manifest Underground Timișoara* (1991), *Revolta Punk* (1991), *Slogan* (cca. 1997), *Clipa Anarhiei* (1999) *Revolta!* (2003)<sup>3</sup> and many others through the translation and retrieval of anarchist texts, was an important one for the movement. All the more so in the case of the LoveKills collective, which practically did a job from scratch, since anarcho-feminism was effectively non-existent until then in Romania. The "mainstream" feminist movements were pretty much limited to liberal ones<sup>4</sup>, which were criticized by radical groups.

## LoveKills: This is NOT a love story!

LoveKills was the first anarcho-feminist collective in Romania, active between 2003-2009 in several cities in the country, including Craiova, Timișoara and Bucharest. They published a fanzine and organized a festival with the same name, organized debates, workshops, film screenings, readings, published and distributed brochures for March 8 - International Women's Day and were involved in various actions. LoveKills fought against patriarchy, capitalism, militarism, racism, fascism and xenophobia, as well as for animal rights<sup>5</sup>.

*Why LoveKills? Love kills – it is the truth recognized around ourselves. Wherever love emerges, it is followed by hate, jealousy, constraint. A great part of restrictions of freedoms and liberties are done in the name of love. Most of the crimes are done out of love. Parents are beating up their children because they love them and they wish the best for them. The State is leading wars for the wellbeing of its people, to protect*

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief history of anarchism in Romania see (in English) <https://pagini-libere.ro/en/bratulean/> and <https://pagini-libere.ro/en/science-popularization-and-romanian-anarchism-in-the-nineteenth-century-cos>

<sup>2</sup> A very interesting narrative history of the underground punk scene in Romania can be read here (in Romanian): <http://punkz5.tripod.com/id10.html>.

<sup>3</sup> An "Otherground" fanzine archive collection is available in *Fanzinul Fanzinelor TM. 20 de ani de fanzine și publicații Otherground în Timișoara (1994-2014) – O colecție incompletă și subiectivă*, by Pavilion 32.

<sup>4</sup> For a history of the feminist movement in Romania, see Miroiu, M. (coord.), Molocea, A., Vlad, I., Branea, C.I. (2015). *Mișcări feministe și ecologiste în România (1990-2014)*, Polirom. <http://elibrary.snsa.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Miscari-feministe.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> For the documentation of this article I went through 14 of the 17 issues of the zine (3 of them not to be found online at the time) and other materials from various sources, and I talked to some of the initiators of the LoveKills collective in an interview from which I reproduced excerpts in this text (in italics).

*them. State and Church are enforcing laws against abortion for the continuation of the nation and out of love for the yet unborn ones. The patriarchal system, full of hate and revenge, has transformed love into the most terrible feeling, into a feeling of weakness. This way, the woman represents love – she is embodying love. The woman is urging her sons to go to war and to love their country. The woman is the one, who out of love for her daughter, urges her to marry in order to assure her future. The woman is the one who is scarifying her body for the State. The woman is the one who, out of too much love, is maintaining the status quo, although only she is able to change it. The woman can change the system, thinking of herself, wearing a fight for the individual freedom.*

*Love kills in a system based on hatred; love is a perverted feeling, that doesn't belong in this world.*

*– Interview with LoveKills from 2009<sup>6</sup>*

The first issue of the LoveKills fanzine appeared in 2003 in Craiova, then spread to other cities. It was the first anarcho-punk fanzine in Romania created by and which had in its center the Punk girl, the women Anarchists, not the males which dominated the punk scene. This was also the zine's initial motivation to prove that women were also actively involved in the punk movement and that they had made an important contribution throughout anarchist history. To dismantle the sexist ideas that prevailed in society and to militate for free expression. But this is exactly what bothered male pride, and it was only after years that they began to feel that they were receiving good reactions from the people who discovered them.

*What determined us? In any direction we turned our heads, we saw the patriarchal culture, I think that determined us, the social context of that time.*

*[...]*

*The first one that appeared was the fanzine, not the collective, in 2003, it was written by \*\*\*<sup>7</sup> who was already writing in other anarchist publications in which there were guys. The fact that a girl started publishing an anarcho-punk fanzine in which the punk girl was very prominent and there was talk about sexism and patriarchy disturbed the macho-punk scene in Craiova a lot. Because of this, the punk scene there split up and then all sorts of problems, conflicts, violence between groups began to appear, ie the active group that militated and the other punks. Somehow out of solidarity and all these events, we joined her work, both myself and \*\*, this is what we remember, and I think we called ourselves a collective once we decided to organize festivals. Until then, it was just LoveKills fanzine.*

## **FEMINISM: in a complicated relationship**

LoveKills saw themselves more as coming from the *Do It Yourself* (DIY) and anarcho-punk movement rather than the feminist one, which they generally associated with liberal feminism. Punk was seen as liberating music for women, because they could choose their own style, be it sexualized or desexualized, outside the social norms and conventions, they could introduce new

<sup>6</sup> Source: <http://www.grassrootsfeminism.net/cms/node/161>

<sup>7</sup> At the request of the LoveKills members, I anonymized their names.

representations about the role of women in music and beyond. For this reason, in many issues of the zine there are articles about "Women in punk", lyrics from different songs or interviews with punk girls, the members of the group also identifying themselves in this way. At the beginning of the zine, there was even a vehement article entitled "I'm not a feminist because I don't consider myself a victim."

*LoveKills Collective is an anarcha-feminist project, so the direction would be more towards DIY and not so much towards third wave feminism, although DIY ethics is considered to be part of it. Theoretically we are feminists of course, but in our experience the feminism we came across, especially in Romania (a sort of second wave feminism), is something that we are actually opposing or rejecting, as we see it like something that re-enforces the gender binary and domination.*

*For example the feminism nowadays in Romania is much related to the Orthodox Church and goes hand in hand with orthodox-Christian morality. By this logic, it is obviously undermining women's reproductive rights, rights that have been regained in the beginning of 90s, after decades of dictatorship. It is also urging the woman to piously submit to the patriarchal pattern of family (absolute value of Romanian society). The emancipated woman for these feminists is the manager / politician / president woman with a major focus on orthodox affinity. We are of course opposing such emancipation since we are calling for boycotting the elections and fighting against any sort of hierarchical structure. The third wave is very little represented in the Romanian context.*

*The main idea of our work and the main focus is anarchism. We attach feminism to anarchism as we see that there are still issues to deal with, regarding sexism and domination in the "free" and "friendly" environments, the so-called anarchist mediums. But anarchism is more stressed as we consider it to be the pertinent way to achieve the absolute freedom of all beings. – LoveKills interview from 2009<sup>8</sup>*

Somewhere around 2005-2006, at no. 7 of LoveKills, however, there was a change in the self-identification of the zine, which went from the label of "Anarcho-punk Fanzine" to "Anarcho-feminist". I tried to better understand their relationship to feminism, what they meant by that word, how it was viewed in anarchist communities. The answer received was that **the anarcho-feminism they identified with had nothing to do with "feminism."**

*We did not declare ourselves feminists then, under any circumstances, and neither afterwards, nor later, nor at this time. [...] Not fitting into feminism, not agreeing with it, not believing in feminism that it is a solution, does not mean that you are anti-feminist. I mean, feminism for me doesn't talk about the state at all, it doesn't go to the root at all, where the problem is. I don't think feminism helps, but I do NOT declare myself anti-feminist. I was clearly an anarchist.*

*How was feminism perceived then? It was quite difficult in the anarchist scene to talk about anarcho-feminism, or feminism had no place in the discussion among people, in any case among anarchists in general neither anarcho-feminism, nor feminism, nor any struggle against sexism. It was a mined subject at the time.*

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<sup>8</sup> Source: <http://www.grassrootsfeminism.net/cms/node/161>

Some of the texts in the LoveKills zines, especially in the early years, were translations of texts from international anarchy-feminist authors or groups, considered relevant to their own local experiences and histories. However, especially in the last years of activity, the zines also included texts written by the members of the collective, based on their own experiences, as well as texts received from collaborators from abroad. They wrote about the actions and practices of other anarchy-feminist groups such as Rote Zora (West Germany), Mujeres Libres (Spain), Mujeres Creando (Bolivia), anarchist biographies, interviews with other groups, criticism of nationalization (institutionalization) – including that of relationships, gender roles and heteronormativity – sexuality, sex work, pornography, objectification, the right to abortion, violence against women and self-defence, labour - inequalities and capitalist and patriarchal exploitation, vegetarianism and animal liberation, various forms of oppression, racism, sexism, homophobia, criticism of various feminist perspectives (liberal / capitalist, racist and that support patriarchy), men's attitudes in the struggle for women's emancipation, topics debated today as well.

## Solidarity and mutual aid

The zines were distributed at punk concerts in different cities of the country, at book fairs, on trips and other local, national or international gatherings. Or by post mail, to those who did not reach the events. Lilith-LK<sup>9</sup> recounts how the collectives from different cities were small, but they supported each other. When a group organized an event somewhere, for example in Timișoara, people came from other cities, Bucharest, Craiova, and in this way they distributed their materials to each other.

*At that time, the distribution took place in all the cities where there were punks, activists, anarchists, concerts. The groups or the active people collaborated with each other, we collaborated and we all had brochures, zines, flyers everywhere. If something was done in Craiova, I would make a flyer against fascism, the Noua Dreaptă<sup>10</sup> (New Right), we would find a way to distribute them, either on the day they went, or that week, everywhere, in other cities where there were people. If something was done in Iași with animals, everyone shared that flyer. That's how it was done. No, no one forced you, but it was **solidarity**. Being few, it was better to share everywhere. That's what it was like back then. **There was this solidarity and we helped each other.***

In 2006, LoveKills began publishing special editions in English for people outside Romania, in order to raise funds for the festival. These issues included translations of some of the articles in the Romanian language zines, as well as articles written by other groups or people from abroad, or texts presented at the workshops or discussions within the LoveKills festival.

The festival started in 2006 as well, from the desire to have an event that is not limited to punk music, concerts and having fun together, but also to have debates and workshops, to problematize

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<sup>9</sup> For this article, I contacted the initiators of the LoveKills team and asked them a few questions. The answers received are commonly agreed by several of them, their desire being not to be named, not even with initials. For this reason I chose to render their answers for the name Lilith-LK (Lilith-LoveKills), after the name of the collective's blog (<https://lilith-lovekills.blogspot.com/>), Lilith being a symbol of disobedience often taken up by anarchy-feminists.

<sup>10</sup> A far-right group active in Romania since 2000 as NGO and since 2015 as official party.

aspects of punk culture seen as problematic. The aim of the festival was to bring together activists from the national and international anarchist scene, to create networks and to work together on self-education, awareness and de-construction of the manifestations of sexism and patriarchy beyond gender:

*There are anarchists or people in general that you do or don't get along with. From different points of view. We didn't divide them into guys and girls back then, and we don't divide them like that now either. And back then girls and boys were equally patriarchal and sexist. We are all victims of the same system, the **patriarchy**, except that women are double victims, they are under the domination of both the man and the system. But no, by no means did we have this thing that they are boys ... On the contrary, we had boys who helped us, after we started to become a collective, to be a festival, we had the involvement of many boys who helped us, and a bunch of girls who kicked us out ...*

## **Demoralizations, transformations and energetic comebacks**

The collective published 17 issues of the zine in the course of 6 years<sup>11</sup> and organized 4 editions of the LoveKills festival. According to the members of the collective, the disintegration took place somewhere around 2008-2009 (when there were the last editions of the zine and the festival). They were influenced by the impact on the entire anarchist scene of the violence and abuse of law enforcement on the NATO summit protesters, as well as some personal changes in their lives.

*At one point, I think at the third festival, somehow two of us moved to other countries, Germany, Italy, somehow it was harder with communication, there was also a lack of time, and all that, and we didn't continue.*

*Yes, what happened in the context of the NATO summit I can say that it destroyed the whole movement, the anarchist scene, the left, if there was something of a leftist scene, but it destroyed all of it and afterwards it re-appeared very hard, I can say that a reappearance of it was formed when the Roşia Montană movement emerged, and yes, it broke any connection, it had an impact ... the control that was then and in the days before and what happened after, the police control ... brought a lot of mental problems or fear, panic, all sorts of things that made it hard for people to have the strength to start over.*

***How do you look at that period? Has anything fundamental changed in your ideological position on anarchism, feminism, capitalism, socialism?***

*Anarchism was built, I might say, more solidly. I would add fascism to capitalism. At the moment I don't see them as separate, I think we are living the most fascist form of capitalism or it is the most capitalist global fascism of all time. I don't*

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<sup>11</sup> On the LoveKills website - <http://aro.ecobytes.net/lovekills/resurse.html> only 14 issues are archived, and on Anarhiva.com the last number archived was 16 at the time of writing this, which was most likely published in 2008. An older interview given to the Grassroots Feminism website for a queer feminist anthology entitled *Do It Yourself: Dispatches from the Transnational Zine Movement*, 17 issues are mentioned over 6 years, from which we deduce that the last issue was published in early 2009, before this interview: <http://www.grassrootsfeminism.net/cms/node/161>

*know, they're mixed up, I can't see them separately anymore. I have never bothered with socialism and with feminism as well, I don't believe in it, it's like a bandage to the wound of capitalism or not, to the wound of patriarchy, we just don't go to the root. We put it there so that the wound is not visible but we don't go to the root. Not to be misunderstood, at the same time I stand in solidarity with all the struggles, revolts, resistance of all women everywhere, no matter what they believe, or in what they believe. I believe less in neoliberal feminism.*

For several years it was quite quiet on the anarchist scene due to collective demoralization, until 2010-2013, when different groups began to mobilize against the background of the crisis, harsh austerity measures or exploitation in Roșia Montană. With the appearance of Marxist, anarchist, or mixed initiatives like CriticAtac, Occupy Conti (Cluj-Napoca), Occupy CNDB and then the Faculty of History (Bucharest), Tinerii Mânioși, FânFest, Occupy UBB (Cluj-Napoca) or Roșia Montană, a new activist momentum took root and grew, slowly but organically, on a large scale, new collectives were formed, while some of the "old" anarchists also remained active, although more "low profile". New groups and spaces appeared in different cities such as Bucharest (Alternative Library - 2010), Craiova (Do-It-Yourself Space Craiova - 2012) or Cluj-Napoca (A-casă - 2013).

There are today in Romania at least two still active projects for documenting and recovering the Romanian anarchist history: Editura Pagini Libere and ANARHIVA. On the ANARHIVA website I found scanned most of the issues in LoveKills, as well as other flyers or brochures produced by other anarcho-punk groups from that period. Until recently, Râvna was also very active in publishing - one of the longest-lived anarchist groups, their website being active between 2010-2018.

## **Feminist complicities, historical (de)connections and (dis)continuities**

There are also other anarcho-feminist groups that were active at the same time or after LoveKills that should be mentioned. *ladyfest-ro* was the only one active in the same time in the 2000s. They were the organizers of the anarcho-feminist festival LadyFest, and published two issues of the eponymous zine and organized in 2007 the Take Back the Night! event in Bucharest. After the two editions of the LadyFest festival - from 2005 (Timișoara) and 2007 (Bucharest), in 2008 they were reorganized under the name *grupul F.I.A* (girls / women / feminism in action / activism), active until 2015. Part of the *FIA group*, together with an informal group from the local anarcho-punk scene, initiated in 2010 in Bucharest a collective housing project - *Biblioteca Alternativă* (Alternative Library). The same year was formed the Feminist Reading Circle - *Cercul de lecturi feministe* hosted by the Alternative Library, with an overlap between the two groups. The Alternative Library also functioned as a social-community center, organizer of meetings, workshops, freeshops, film screenings, etc. Later, in 2013, the group split and part of it formed the *Centru feminist Sofia Nadejde* (CFSN). In parallel, in 2015, a new feminist reading circle appeared, which published in 2016 and 2019 two numbers of the *Dysnomia* zine - an "independent feminist / queer / intersectional publication".



In Cluj-Napoca, the informal group *zine fem* has been active since 2013, "militating for safe spaces for women, against sexual harassment and gender-based violence and daily patriarchal shit." In addition to many years of organizing workshops, marches, discussions "about consent or alternative styles of relationships", brunches and other events for women and non-binary people, the group also published two editions of the feminist fanzine *zine fem*, in 2018 and 2019, and got involved in organizing the Autonomous Book Fair in Cluj, in November 2019, together with Pagini Libere.

In the same year, 2018, the first issue of *CUTRA* appears in Bucharest, a magazine self-defined as queer and anti-fascist pop-radical intersectional feminist. The second issue is launched in 2019, with articles published periodically and online. The collective managed to maintain a continuity, publishing, not without difficulties, the third issue in 2020. The *CUTRA* team adopts a slightly different, more "institutionalized" approach, in the sense that the magazine started and continues as a project with annual funding from the Ministry of Culture, through grant competitions. This allowed the team to expand its distribution network, to publish articles periodically and involve a large number of people in the production of online and print content.

Although the contemporary feminist publishing groups *Dysnomia*, *zine fem* and *CUTRA* prefer to present themselves as "intersectional" collectives and fanzines rather than explicitly anarcho-feminist, they are compatible with the principles of anarcho-feminism and can be seen as a metamorphosis of the movement started by LoveKills or LadyFest / FIA, carrying on some of the work they started in the 2000s. It should also be mentioned that Pagini Libere Publishing Collective, although not exclusively or primarily anarcho-feminist, also subscribes to this orientation, translating and publishing brochures with texts of classical or contemporary anarchists, from Emma Goldman to bell hooks, as well as local Romanian anarcho-feminist perspectives and a series of translations of these texts in Hungarian, in collaboration with a-szem collective.

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The Anarchist Library (Mirror)

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