

Berlingske, previously known as Berlingske Tidende, is a Danish national daily newspaper based in Copenhagen. First published on 3 January 1749, Berlingske is Denmark's, as well as the Nordic region's, oldest continually operating newspaper and among the oldest newspapers in the world.

She dropped makeup in the country obsessed with beauty and became a feminist.

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In South Korea, war has broken out between anti-feminists and feminists. The angry young men have gained political momentum from the newly elected Conservative President Yoon, who went to the polls to cut off the Ministry of Gender Equality in the country, where women earn a third less. In Seoul, Berlingske has met the feminist Jina Kim, who is at the forefront of the war.

Jina Kim was an incarnated fan of »Sex and The City«.

She walked in towering heels, curled her hair and spent oceans of money and time caring for her skin. She made smokey eyes and kept thin as a line on a strict diet. She identified with the character Samantha in the TV series.

In fact, she was closest to Samantha, she laughs from the other side of the café table, gesturing with her arms to support the story of her past life as a busy creative director at an advertising agency in Seoul.

Since then, Jina Kim has undergone a drastic transformation that has sent her to the forefront of the firing line in the war between the sexes in South Korea.

She has cut her hair very short. She has erased all makeup from her face so that it shines naked in the glow of the café lamps. She is in a practical blue shirt and green bermuda shorts. The feet are tucked into tennis socks and sneakers.

Jina Kim has jumped off the sizzling hot train in the country, where studies show that almost every third woman gets plastic surgeries. Jina Kim became a feminist in South Korea, where the term is considered to be an extreme mystical ideology, and only a few dare to confess suit with name and face for fear of being attacked and hung out on the net.

"Here, feminists are considered Lord Voldemort. It should not be controversial, but it has become controversial, especially after the presidential election," says Jina Kim, who owns the café Woolf Social Club, where Berlingske meets her in Seoul.

Behind the bar counter are large black book stems on a sign: "More dignity, less bullshit"

"Here, feminists are considered Lord Voldemort."



JINA KIM, FEMINIST WRITER AND CAFE OWNER

In 2019, Jina Kim wrote a book about her thoughts on being a woman in South Korea. It became her way to be a co-founder of the Women's Party on The International Women's day 8 March 2020. Photo: Lene Winther

In South Korea, war-like conditions erupted between feminists and anti-feminists during the most recent presidential campaign of the year. The tensions between the groupings are far from new, they have long simmered in the deeply patriarchal country, which is otherwise best known for the success story of the country, which rose from the ashes after the Korean War and became one of the richest and most technologically advanced in the world.

But when it comes to gender equality, one has to look far for the successes. For example, women earn on average a third less than men, which gives South Korea a bottom position among the world's developed countries.

South Korea ranks as number 102 out of 156 countries in the World Economic Forum's latest Global Gender Gap Index just above countries such as Cambodia and Senegal.

May 10 in South Korea a new Conservative president, Yoon Suk-yeol, from the People's Power party, who in his election campaign courted the younger men who have become angry over the growing voice of feminists in South Korea.

The young men are convinced that they live up to discrimination and unfair treatment in a country where feminists, in their view, have been given far too much power.

Among other things, they complain about their 18 months of compulsory military service, which in their optics stretches legs for their careers.

Yoon Suk-yeol blamed feminism for South Korea's low birth rates and promised during its campaign to abolish the country's Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Affairs. The ministry currently provides services for families, education and social welfare for children and accounts for 0.2 percent of South Korea's annual budget.

Out of that, less than three percent, according to the BBC, goes to promoting equality for women.

President Yoon Suk-yeol himself has said that there is no systemic sex based discrimination in South Korea. Last summer, according to the Korea Exposé magazine, he stated that "feminism is said to be politically exploitative and blocks healthy dating between men and women."

Feminists want to spoil "Titanic"

Among his most active anti-feminist supporters is New Men's Solidarity. The group is led by Bae In-kyu and has nearly 500,000 subscribers on its YouTube channel.

"Feminists have used extreme means to dominate our society and culture. They have successfully dominated our streets and what we see online. This pressure has influenced politicians to choose their side, and it has affected men's rights," Bae In-kyu said in an interview with South Korean tabloid 'The Ilyosisa'.

In another interview with the media 'Asian Boss', he calls feminists "extreme misandrias" (someone who hates or distrusts men, ed.).

The problem, in his view, is that feminists want women and men to be exactly the same.

"We claim nothing else. Instead of gender equality, we argue for gender harmony. Men and women are inherently too different. We are built physically and emotionally differently. That is why we must cover for each other's weaknesses and work together as a team to achieve true harmony between the sexes," says Bae In-kyu, leader, new men's solidarity.

In the same interview, he uses the ending of the big movie 'Titanic' as an example, where Leonardo DiCaprio sacrifices himself for Kate Winslet. If Leonardo DiCaprio had lived in a world dominated by radicalized feminists, the two should have played rock, scissors and paper about which of them should be allowed to cling to the door that served as a lifeboat in the ice school they watered. But he chose to sacrifice himself and go to the death of the woman.

"If there was to be equality between the sexes, then the beautiful fragrance would have been destroyed," says Bae In-kyu.

When the feminists have taken to the streets to demonstrate against sexual violence or sex based discrimination, representatives of New Men's Solidarity have faithfully appeared in the

same place. "Out with misogynists." "Feminism is a mental illness," they shouted, according to The New York Times.

A bestial murder

The Woolf Social Club is located on a corner between a motorway and a Harley Davidson store in the more festive district of Itaewon, where Americans from the nearby military base mingle with South Koreans on the streets.

Outside, cars and buses rush past on the motorway, which leads to the other side of Han Square, which cuts through Seoul.

Inside the cafe's walls, friends of friends talk softly over the ice cream parlor with straws, while vinyl records and feminist books fill the shelves.

The cafe is named after author Virginia Woolf. Coffee cups with drawings of the British icon with an angry wolf on his T-shirt are printed on it and stacked up on the bar counter. The idea was to create a safe space for women where they do not experience discrimination, says 46-year-old Jina Kim.

"People are trying to hide online. It is important that there is a physical place where they can have their voice to talk about women's rights," she says.

However, both women and men are welcome at the cafe.

The place is inspired by the author's famous essay "A room of one's own" from 1929. Jina Kim read the essay when she was younger, but at that time the message about women's need for their own space, both physically and symbolically, did not apply.

It was only when Jina Kim reread it in her 30s that she understood the feminist thinking that it was necessary for women there who wanted to assert themselves as poets and writers in a male world to acquire "five hundred (pounds) per year and a room with a lock on the door".

But it was a bestial murder in a public toilet in the Gangnam district on the other side of Hangang Square that radically changed Jina Kim's life.

It was May 17, 2016. A man was waiting inside the toilet at Gangnam Subway Station, a place name that is otherwise best known in the outside world from Psy's hit 'Gangnam Style' from 2012. The man had come to kill, but not anyone. He had come to kill a woman. Six men managed to visit the toilet without him doing anything. Only when the seventh person, a 23-year-old woman, came in did he strike. She was stabbed to death.

Afterwards, the 34-year-old killer said that he had been "ignored and degraded" by women all his life.

The killing left women in South Korea terrified and angry. For Jina Kim and many other South Korean women, it became a catalyst for something far greater that was about the view of women. Jina Kim worked and lived close to Gangnam station and thought it was safe there.

“It could have been me,” she says.

But police denied the killing had a misogynistic motive. The man had a history of mental illness. It was just a mind-boggling man, they said. That meant Jina Kim started thinking about being a woman in South Korea.



Jina Kim herself has been discriminated against because of her sex. Among other things, she has been buried in the subway in Seoul.

Photo: Lene Winther

“I saw myself for the first time as a woman. Before I lived in denial and thought I could do the same as a man,” she says.

Before, she had not been interested in women's rights. She had great success in her job at the advertising agency and felt powerful and in control of her life.

But there was also an older episode at work that before the massacre in Gangnam, which had set the initial thoughts in motion. She had been working seven days a week for two years when an important promotion in the company. She even thought she was the obvious candidate.

But a less successful male colleague got promoted. The reason? He had a wife and small children to support, was the reason given by the boss.

"My boss said it was more natural to support him. I was ashamed. I thought there was something wrong with me."

Jina Kim could not bite the disappointment in her, so she quit her job the next day. That was in 2010.

In recent years, the feminist movement has seen "Release from the corset" washed through South Korea. It was a feminist showdown with the unrealistic beauty ideals of South Korea, known for its titrated skin care routines, and for being a country where parents donate plastic co-operation for the children when they have finished primary school at the age of 14-15.

Jina Kim went to demonstrations with over 100,000 women and saw those who had cut their short hair and removed their makeup. She slowly began to transform her own appearance.

"It feels free and comfortable. It takes so much energy (and money) to make women sexually attractive and perform self-objectification." she says.

Big eyes and high cheekbones

The fact that women are under pressure to make themselves attractive is not isolated to South Korea, but here it just seems far more extreme. Strolling around Garosu-gil Street in the rich Gangnam district, the plastic surgery clinics are scattered throughout.

According to Jina Kim, young women are competing to look like K-pop idols. And right now, the trend is to look like the animated characters used in computer games with unnaturally large eyes, smooth skin, high cheekbones and bulging lips.

Jina Kim became a public figure after she wrote a book on feminism in 2019 and in 2020 helped start the political party, Womens Party. After a year, she ran for the election as mayor of Seoul, but without one of the established parties behind her, she did not get far.

That sent Jina Kim into the firing line in a hateful cyber bullying. Here she was hung out with her name and face and called "femi-Nazi", "man-hater" and "discriminator". Men hidden behind black face masks circulated around her cafe, from where they live-streamed it to the web.

She has reported it to the police but has not heard anything. The anonymous men are hard to get convicted. On the whole, it lags with legal certainty for the women who are subjected to harassment and abuse. This also applied to the victims of the so-called 'spy camera' epidemic that has tortured South Korea.

Tiny cameras have been set up on toilets and other places where women undress. Since then, the videos have been posted online, where men pay to watch. But it has been difficult to get those responsible convicted.

In 2019, prosecutors had to drop 43.5 percent of the cases, while 79 percent of those convicted escaped jail time, but instead not a suspended sentence, a fine or a combination

of the two, according to Human Rights Watch. Several of the female victims have the aftermath they committed suicide.

Jina Kim believes the young men live in an echo chamber online where they encounter fake news and propaganda about the women. They feel that something is being taken from them, that women are taking rights from them.

"But we are just asking for simple and basic equal rights in the job market, for example," says Jina Kim.

Right now, she finds it hard to remain positive on behalf of women with the new Conservative government and its responsiveness to young angry men.

"I try to fight one day at a time," says Jina Kim.

But every day, many younger women also come to the cafe to seek advice from her. It gives her a sense that she's making a difference and that it's worth it anyway: "That's the motivation to keep doing it."