Forty years ago, a raging debate about prostitution divided the feminist movement. A group of prostitutes decided to use performance art to support sex workers’ rights. These artists used to expose their fully naked body and to perform sexual acts on stage, provoking strong reactions. In the last ten years, the movement FEMEN has drawn attention to the use of body for political activism. Much debate has arisen about the effectiveness of a protest advocating for women’s rights featuring bare-breasted women. This paper will discuss the hypothesis that these two phenomena are both similar and very different. The comparison will take into account several dimensions: performance and identity (Goffman, Butler); feminist theories and practices; Western culture and non-Western cultures; communication and (new) media. Both macro and micro level perspective will be adopted, as the analysis will take into account a set of documents produced by or on FEMEN and some sex-oriented performance artists, as well as biographical recounts of some leading figures of these two movements. Considering when and where these two movements were born (USA in the 1970s and contemporary Ukraine) and the transnationality of the movements themselves, the focus of this work will be to tackle issues of self-representation, identity, transculturality and activism. Particularly, the aim will be to seek answer to several questions: under which pressures a woman decides to exhibit her naked body as a means of political struggle? What do these two experiences suggest about the use of body in the public sphere today? Why do these movement produce strong reactions? What is the influence of the (new) media on those reactions (media-gaze)?

*Keywords*: body, political activism, performance, self-representation