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From Celebrity Feminism to Feminist Anti-War Resistance

ABSTRACT The research project "Mediated Feminism(s) in Contemporary Russia" (FEMCORUS 2021–25) informs this research note. Our empirical observations highlight the key trends in the dynamics of mediated feminism in Russia, prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and, subsequently, up until autumn 2024. This note considers a decade (2013–22) of the popularization of feminist discourses bolstered by social media sites, influencer culture, and celebrity media, which was then utilized for the anti-war activist mobilization of feminism in Russia. This research note brings new perspectives into the existing debate by identifying several, previously overlooked, aspects of Russian feminism(s). With the focus on the mediated discourses and expressions of feminism, and their role in feminist activist mobilization during Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, our research carves out a novel interdisciplinary space for feminist research in the Russian context at the junction of transnational feminist studies, media studies, and social movement research.
KEYWORDS feminism, mediation, celebrity, anti-war activism

> I'm exactly this resource that you can mobilize very easily. . . . And so there are more and more people like me thanks to the media . . . that is, now a person does not need to read ten volumes of feminist theory [to become a feminist]. (Lana, December 2022)

This is a quote from Lana—an activist of Feminist Anti-War Resistance (FAR) interviewed as part of our research project.[1] Lana emphasizes the connection between media and raising grassroots awareness of feminism, as well as media's role for political mobilization.[2] Her comment indicates a relatively extensive Russian mediascape imbued with feminist ideas and concerns. Lana and other respondents point out that online media enable feminist discourses in a multitude of easily accessible formats contributing to a formation of a feminist collective identity. This, among other reasons, led to a rapid emergence of FAR immediately after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February

1. FEMCORUS is a four-year research project funded by the Research Council of Finland (grant no. 341436, website https://projects.tuni.fi/femcorus/). The case studies analyze feminist online media, influencers, and celebrities. The project also looks at how the feminist movement is (re)organizing itself as the result of the war.

2. From the context of the interview, it is clear that when Lana speaks of resource mobilization, she is referring to the vocabulary of political theory and activist discourses rather than military mobilization.

Communist and Post-Communist Studies, pp. 1–14, ISSN: 0967-067X, e-ISSN: 1873-6920. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CCBY-4.0). View this license's legal deed at http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0 and legal code at http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode for more information. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/cpcs.2025.2660608

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2022. FAR is a constantly changing and digitally-enabled loose transnational network of feminist activists. It quickly became one of the most prominent oppositional actors, recognized domestically by other anti-establishment movements,[3] and internationally. FAR received the prestigious Aachen Peace Prize in September 2023, and its members were invited to contribute to the UN Human Rights Council (FAR 2024). The fact that Russian authorities listed FAR as a "foreign agent" in November 2022 and an "undesirable organization" in April 2024 confirms the high degree of visibility and impact of FAR.

Until recently Russian feminism was primarily associated with academia, the art scene, or NGOs (Shnyrova 2012). During the last decade (2013–22), however, feminism became increasingly "popularized" feeding into the narratives of various celebrities, influencers, and lifestyle magazines. This trend not only applies to Russia but also constitutes a global phenomenon (Kelly 2015, 82). This research note highlights why this mediated "popularized" or "consumer-friendly" feminism, which was previously overlooked by the existing scholarship, should be deemed an important resource in the Russian context. Existing literature on contemporary Russian feminism prioritizes post-2010 feminist movement mainly understood as activism built around an opposition to an increasingly conservative reactionary regime. It demonstrated the adaptability of the Russian feminist movement to the changing political context, expanding our understanding of the grassroots feminist practices and agendas. It also highlighted the increasingly performative and spectacular nature of feminist activism aimed at gaining media visibility and public attention. However, while the media's role in shaping contemporary feminist protest action in Russia has been highlighted in most recent studies (Perheentupa 2022; Rossman 2021; Solovey 2021; Yangeldina 2023), the specific nature of the mediated "popular" feminism remains systematically underexplored. Importantly, existing studies leave out the influence of the globally circulating popular forms of feminism on feminist mobilization in Russia. This note addresses this missing aspect of Russian feminist studies.

During the decade in question (2013–22), we claim that this "popularized" feminism presented itself as apolitical and it almost purposefully overinvested in the ideology of glamour (Miazhevich, forthcoming) and digital media's like economy. We assert that this strategy ensured its broader dissemination and almost unhinged circulation of a range of feminist ideas in Russia. Naturally, it simultaneously somewhat trivialized feminist ideas and obscured more politicized feminist groups and discourses. However, it was one of the most viable strategies for the everyday functioning of feminist-inclined prominent individuals, groups, and organizations considering the ambivalent attitude of both Russian society and the political elite to feminism (and any other movement that can be potentially encroaching into the realm of the "political").

In this research note, informed by the project "Mediated Feminism(s) in Contemporary Russia" (FEMCORUS 2021–25), we will map Russian mediated feminism pre- and

3. For instance, the Anti-Corruption Foundation, founded by Alexei Navalny, cooperated with FAR, providing feminists with a platform to coordinate with activists in Russia (see FAR 2024).

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post-2022 highlighting its key trends and illustrating them with empirical examples.[4] In the following sections we first outline our methodology and point out the key questions concerning the research ethics of running a research project on Russian feminism during wartime. We then move to feminism's popularization during the decade before the full-scale invasion (2013–22), and the formation of FAR in 2022 as an immediate activist response to Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine. In the concluding section, we summarize our (tentative) findings and consider what the implications of the simultaneous popularization and politicization of feminism for the Russian feminist movement might be in the future. With this focus on mediated discourses and expressions of feminism, and their role in feminist activist mobilization during Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, our research opens up a novel interdisciplinary space for feminist research in the Russian context, intersecting the fields of global and transnational feminist studies, media studies, and social movement research.

MEDIATION OF FEMINISM AS AN OBJECT OF STUDY

When we talk about "mediation of feminism," we refer to the range of representations, interpretations, and adaptations of feminism(s) available to the Russian-speaking public via various media and communication technologies. In many cases, scholars regarded the mediated discourses of feminism as a "cultural resource, which can be mobilized for political action offline" rather than "being political in its own right" (Clark 2016, 791). However, we maintain that in order to gain a full understanding of feminism and its potential for Russian contemporary society, we should go beyond this binary and propose to consider *mediation* as the primary sphere of interaction between feminism and society. Therefore, we deploy the media studies term "mediation" to refer to the nonlinear and multipolar process of social transformation that takes place via communication practices and technologies (e.g., Silverstone 2005; Couldry 2008). We pay attention to the characteristics of any given media platform where expressions of feminism are circulated, considering their differing economies, communication structures, modes of interactivity, and the scale of audience outreach (see also Mazzarella 2004).

We highlight the role of media for feminism to be amplified by the simultaneous processes of declining political freedoms and pervasive transnational saturation of Russian mediascape over the past decade or so (e.g., Glazunova 2022; McIntosh Sundstrom, Henry, and Sperling 2022; Litvinenko and Bodrunova 2021). Due to diminishing political opportunities, media and communication technologies provide the main tools and resources for organization, mobilization, and collective identity building of feminist activists in Russia. At the same time, the intensified global mediation of feminism through celebrities, popular culture, and commercial media (Banet-Weiser 2018) has significantly increased the visibility of feminism in Russia and made it

4. A more detailed analysis will be reported in a monograph *Contesting Feminism and Media Culture in Contemporary Russia: From Celebrities to Anti-war Activists* by Saara Ratilainen, Galina Miazhevich, Daniil Zhaivoronok, and Eeva Kuikka (forthcoming).

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"fashionable" especially among the younger generation of media users. Thus, by "mediation of feminism," in this research note, we refer to the manifold processes of meaning-making, practices of symbolic production, and collective contestation via a range of communication technologies that in one way or another contest patriarchy and Russia's conservative gender politics.

We rely on different datasets: digital ethnography, interviews, and publicly available media content consisting of visual, textual, and audio materials. Digital ethnography involves meticulously following various feminist media—from online magazines to YouTube and Telegram channels—observing their content and audience reactions (comments, views, likes, etc.). We also conducted several sets of interviews with research collaborators. The first set of interviews is with FAR activists. We have discussed our data collection and research ethics of interviewing these activists elsewhere (Zhaivoronok 2025), so here we'll provide only the key insights into the research process. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in two rounds: interviews with sixteen FAR activists based in different countries focused on the media practices of the movement (first round of interviews), and five follow-up interviews (in the second interview round) discussed the internal dynamics of the FAR activist network. Another set of interviews included four media professionals from the digital lifestyle outlet *Wonderzine*. Integrating explicit feminist content with consumerist culture and middle-class sensibilities, *Wonderzine* became the first and arguably the most popular instance of "post-postfeminist" (Gill 2016) media in Russia. This means that Wonderzine is a Russian-language media where the open celebration of feminism as an identity or label is combined with a postfeminist and neoliberal interpretation of feminism (Banet-Weiser, Gill, and Rottenberg 2020).[5]

We anonymized all our research participants, and when reporting our research, all interview quotes are translated into English and not presented in their original language, which makes them less identifiable. We did not ask the research participants to sign consent forms. However, in all cases, oral consent for participation was obtained. All research participants were informed about the purpose of the study, along with the ways the interview data would be stored and used during the research cycle.

DECADE OF RUSSIAN MEDIATED FEMINISM (2013–22)

Since Putin's first term as president, social movements in Russia, including feminism, have had to adapt to a series of significant transformations of the civil society and changes in the political landscape. Since the early 2000s feminist networks and other initiatives, such as environmental ones, have come under state scrutiny and, simultaneously,

5. Both *postfeminism* and *neoliberal feminism* are widely used concepts within Feminist Studies. They are highly contested and do not have a single definition but entail various elements. Postfeminism is often understood as a sensibility consisting of both feminist and anti-feminist ideas (Gill 2017), and neoliberal feminism as hyper-individualized women's empowerment discourse entangled with neoliberal economic aspirations (Rottenberg 2018). Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018) discusses the manifold expressions of feminism circulating in popular and commercial media as manifestations of *popular feminism*. These concepts had not been systematically applied to Russian feminist studies previously. One rare example is Salmenniemi and Adamson's (2015) study of "domestication" of post-feminism into the Russian context via the popular genre of self-help literature.

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encountered decreased funding from Western foundations (Johnson and Saarinen 2013; Temkina and Zdravomyslova 2014). As the legal space for organizing protest activities diminished, the rapidly developing sphere of digital media started to play an important role in the repertoire of activist action (McIntosh Sundstrom, Henry, and Sperling 2022). Different activists—from ecological to queer networks and anti-corruption groups—effectively used new media for networking, coordination, mobilizing supporters, fundraising (Glazunova 2022), and subversive resistance via artistic means (Miazhevich 2022).

However, the transformation of the media environment has a qualitatively different impact on the development of feminism in Russia. Feminism transformed beyond activism, academia, and even civil society and became a pop-cultural phenomenon (Ratilainen et al., forthcoming; Zhaivoronok 2020). This is in line with a global trend characteristic of the 2010s and has been extensively documented in different countries from China to the USA (e.g., Clark-Parsons 2022; Han and Liu 2024). For instance, Favaro and Gill (2018) note that during this period, feminism became a cool, fashionable, and trendy topic. Many global celebrities, from Beyoncé to Taylor Swift, including male celebrities such as Harry Styles and Mark Ruffalo, came out as feminists (Crepax 2020). Researchers have even described this resurgence as a moment of "feminist zeitgeist" in popular culture (Gill 2016, 5–6).

This wave of popular, media-endorsed feminism did not bypass Russia. As we will show below, in the 2010s, celebrities identifying themselves as feminists began to appear in Russia, new professional media outlets paying great attention to the feminist agenda emerged, and, within digital culture, a scene of feminist influencers and micro-influencers flourished. We want to draw attention to the fact that this mediated environment of highly visible and popular feminism had a significant impact on the development of feminist culture and, indeed, on grassroots activism in Russia—an aspect that often remains overlooked by those researchers who analyze Russian feminism within political and social movement studies.

Our research—contrary to a common belief that feminism is perceived negatively across Russian society (e.g., Khrebtan-Hörhager and Pyatovskaya 2024, 16)—demonstrates that it became acceptable to publicly express feminist standpoints, at least among the younger demographic. As one FAR activist puts it, describing a shift in societal attitudes during the past decade, "if you want to be trendy and hip, you'd rather be a feminist, than not." We connect this statement to the ample growth and diversification of Russian-language feminist media available online as, since the mid-2010s, hundreds or even thousands of feminist communities, groups, bloggers, and influencers have appeared on various social networking sites, such as VK (a Russian social media platform analogous to Facebook), X, Facebook, Instagram, and later Telegram and TikTok.

For example, the list of feminist online resources compiled by the activist and educational collective RFO "ONA" (*Rossiiskoe feministskoe ob"edinenie "ONA,"* Russian feminist alliance "SHE")[6] includes more than 200 links to Russian-language initiatives.

6. https://ona.org.ru/femosphere

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And this list encompasses only collective projects using VK leaving out numerous influencers who produce feminist content independently, and such platforms important for feminism as Instagram, YouTube, and X. These types of feminist figures include artist and activist Daria Serenko (33.8k followers on X); ecofeminist Tasha Tale (127k, Instagram); journalists Tatiana Mingalimova (975k, YouTube) and Lisa Laserson (84.5k, YouTube); and illustrator Nika Vodvud aka nixelpixel (431k, YouTube), who was labeled as "the most famous Russian feminist" by the oppositional news media *Meduza* in 2019 (Abrosimova 2019). The ways of engaging with feminism vary between the individual actors. For instance, Serenko is a visible figure in feminist activism and founding member of FAR, while Mingalimova engages with an entrepreneurial type of agentic or choice feminism (cf. Rottenberg 2018).

Moreover, this diverse feminist online scene was fragmented and fraught with internal conflicts. Feminists were divided over specific issues, such as sex work (Kondakov and Zhaivoronok 2019; Sen'kova 2018), along different political allegiances (left, liberal, intersectional, radical, etc.), by the attitudes toward transgender people, and by structural positions "in terms of geographical location and race" (Solovey 2021, 171). Additionally, there were numerous interpersonal conflicts, particularly among feminist microinfluencers. The fragmentation of the field had various effects on feminist engagement: from frustration and alienation for some activists to the production of new identities and projects for others (Solovey 2021, 43, 129).

To sum up, the diversification of media and popularization of feminism has fostered numerous positionalities and led to the (cross)mediation of feminist discourses across different domains. The younger-generation journalist Tatiana Mingalimova, successfully and flexibly employing various online platforms for professional development, serves as a good example of an intermediate figure between both global and local feminist media cultures as well as between the individualized "celebrity feminism" (Hobson 2017) and feminist political activism. With her popular YouTube channel Nezhnyi Redaktor ("Gentle Editor"), she aspired to establish a Russian version of celebrity feminism and to create a dialogue between Russian feminists with different positionalities, for instance, by interviewing Nadia Tolokonnikova of Pussy Riot and Anna Rivina, the founder of NGO *Nasiliiu net* ("No to violence") providing legal aid to survivors of gendered violence (Ratilainen et al., forthcoming).

Paradoxically, feminist influencers, seemingly overinvested in individualization of feminism and digital like economy, introduced the key feminist concepts to the public; that is, they contributed to popularization of feminism for Russian-language media audiences. In doing so, they also educated the public via the everyday mundane practice of social media, and occasionally "smuggled" into the domain of celebrity and lifestyle media discussions central to feminist grassroots civic activism, such as critical accounts of domestic violence in Russia (Zhaivoronok 2020). Having said that, the popular mediated figures still have to tread a fine line articulating such ideas to be perceived as nonthreatening to the conservative, patriarchal regime.

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High-profile celebrities demonstrate equally peculiar forms of feminist engagement.[7] One illustrative example is socialite, journalist, and ex-presidential candidate Ksenia Sobchak, daughter of St. Petersburg's late mayor Anatolii Sobchak. She skillfully employs her chameleon-like persona to navigate the deeply rooted patriarchal gender norms flirting with a range of feminist discourses. Her journalistic tactics oscillated between serving as the embodiment of the feminization of resistance (e.g., her participation in the 2011–12 anti-presidential protests and her 2018 presidential campaign) to trivializing emancipatory politics, for instance, during her infamous interview with Pussy Riot in 2013 for the oppositional TV channel *Rain*, where Sobchak's line of interviewing was staged to undermine their activism (Miazhevich 2018).[8] Her personal stance on feminism (such as occasional public statements on gender equality or visual statements including the front cover of *Glamour* magazine in 2017, which featured Sobchak in a T-shirt stating "Women power" and with her fist raised as a sign of defiance or/and female unity) is devoid of a clear-cut declaration of feminist positionality. Since the full-scale invasion, Sobchak has continued her "balancing act" by maintaining her online journalistic activity and avoiding a clear stance on the war, simultaneously, advocating for the patriotic residing in Russia. Other celebrities, such as pop singer Svetlana Loboda,[9] have incorporated similar tactics when ambiguously engaging with feminist discourses via camp or irony prior to 2022 (Zhaivoronok 2020).

Finally, the case of singer Manizha constitutes a different angle of celebrity feminist advocacy within Russian-speaking media spaces. Among other things, she is transnationalizing Russian feminism and discusses Russian colonialism. Manizha, who is of Tajik origin, often addresses important social issues in her music, such as gender-based violence, discrimination against migrants, and the challenges faced by ethnic minorities in Russia (Wiedlack and Zabolotny 2023). In 2021, she represented Russia at the Eurovision Song Contest with the song "Russian Woman," which contains elements of female empowerment as well as an ironic critique of the hegemonic patriarchal image of Russian womanhood as "the only available narrative for representing femininity" (Zhaivoronok 2021) in Russian pop culture and, more broadly, in the public sphere. Despite a vehement negative backlash from some Russian politicians and high-ranking officials, Manizha's participation in Eurovision was a landmark moment. It underscored the growing visibility and public status of popular feminism and its intersectional aspect in Russia up to 2022.

Within the professional media market, the emergence of *Wonderzine* in 2013, a digital feminist lifestyle outlet (Wiedlack and Zabolotny 2023), signaled a crucial shift, as it

7. Here celebrity is understood as, frequently, but not necessarily, media-enabled popularity which, indeed, has a different range of fame. It can span from what is known as *macro-* (Sobchak) to *meso-* (Mingalimova and Manizha) and micro-celebrities (Daria Serenko). Meso-influencers or celebrities have up to a million followers with national visibility, and macro-influencers are often celebrities with over one million followers, while micro-celebrities have a following of up to thousands of social media users.

8. See the interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2J7GBFsfs9A.

9. Svetlana Loboda is a Ukrainian-origin pop singer who has made a successful career in Russia since the 1990s. After Russia's full-scale invasion, she became a vocal advocate for Ukrainian armed forces. She is doing charity work and raising funds to rebuild the Ukrainian territories destroyed in Russia's attacks.

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introduced a post-postfeminist media model (Gill 2016) into the Russian context. According to the media professionals we interviewed, *Wonderzine* presented feminism in a neoliberal format, where it was often commodified and associated with consumption practices rather than political protest. However, this very neutralization and glamorization of feminism played a crucial role in popularizing feminist discourses and making them more accessible and relatable to a middle-class audience. As one of our respondents, journalist Diana, pointed out, in the Russian context "it was, perhaps, necessary to publish articles about gender discrimination and intersectional feminism next to texts about trendy designer coats" to make feminism more popular in Russia.

In sum, this trajectory of "popularization" of feminism in Russian media spaces prior to the full-scale war included a variety of niche-feminist projects and mediated phenomena akin to a Western type of "neoliberal" and "popular" feminism (Rottenberg 2018; Banet-Weiser 2018). This hyper-emphasized use of postfeminist and neoliberal frameworks enabled distance from the anti-regime political activism. However, it was still concerned with domestic violence and other issues related to gender politics. By doing so, it opened new avenues and formats for their discussion (albeit) within the celebrity framework.

FEMINISM IN RUSSIA POST-2022

One of the most significant feminist projects since the beginning of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine is the Feminist Anti-War Resistance (FAR). In our sixteen interviews with FAR activists, we discussed the development of feminism in Russia before the escalation of the military crisis into a full-fledged war, the role of media within this process, as well as the influence of media platforms and online cultures on various aspects of FAR. These initial interviews were later supplemented with five follow-up interviews to understand the dynamics within the movement. Our interviews constitute a unique dataset, as they contain rich descriptions and reflections of our research participants' individual life trajectories and politicization, their media preferences and experiences with and attitudes toward different media platforms and media figures. Moreover, they provide a unique perspective on the post-2022 development of feminist consciousness and organizing centered on the activists' perspectives, highlighting the inextricable entanglement of feminism(s) with Russia's media environment.

First, the data strongly emphasize that feminist media and/or mediated forms of feminism were influential *beyond* feminist or activist communities. Our research participants referred to various changes in different aspects of social life: romantic relationships, professional attitudes, mundane activities. For instance, one activist mentioned that in her professional milieu sexist jokes, which were common ten years ago, are now considered inappropriate. Another participant noted that feminitives (i.e., adding a feminine suffix to nouns designating professional occupations and linguistically gendered as masculine) became rather widespread both in professional media and in everyday conversations. These trends correspond to other findings discussed in this special issue, which highlight progressive transformations of gendered roles and expectations in some

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social groups (Smyth, Dekalchuk, and Grigoriev 2025; Kostenko 2025). Following our participants, we underscore that various media endorsed feminists—from activists and bloggers to celebrity figures—should be credited for their resilience and creativity and for making such transformations possible. Of course, these societal transformations are not universal and mostly limited to a certain demographic (urbanites, younger generation, creative/middle class). But with all the caveats, this is a testament to the ability of mediated feminism acting as a kind of soft power to influence mundane material realities even in such restrictive authoritarian and conservative contexts as in Russia.

Second, the emergence of such projects as FAR after the full-scale invasion became possible mainly due to pre-2022 developments: an increased visibility of feminist discourses and their accessibility, construction of collective feminist identity, accumulation of social, media, and cultural capital by certain feminist actors, and so on. For instance, when asked about the major influences on the development of their feminist identities, two FAR activists mentioned lifestyle outlet *Wonderzine*'s influence, one mentioned the role of influencer Tatiana Mingalimova, four mentioned activist-influencer Daria Serenko, and everyone referred to various blogs, channels, streams, and websites in the Russian language. This again highlights the central role that mediated popular feminist discourses play in the development of feminist activist identities. As these examples show, the pre-2022 period laid the groundwork for a more politicized feminist engagement,[10] making it possible for initiatives like FAR to emerge and thrive in the aftermath of the full-scale invasion.

As Ratilainen and Zhaivoronok (2024) argue, FAR's main contribution to the re-composition of post-2022 feminism is that they superimposed overt anti-war and anti-Putin positions onto popular forms of feminism.[11] Both public self-positioning of the project and activists' accounts point to FAR's ambition to transform pre-war feminist cultural and media capital into a concerted political force. Simultaneously, this move reveals a very complex understanding of *the political* by some activists. Even though they acknowledge pre-war feminism's transformative power, they do not necessarily see this power as political. Moreover, they do not always see FAR as a political organization, but rather as a media project or "artivism." While most of the interviewed activists had a common understanding of such terms as intersectionality or domestic violence, they didn't necessarily reflect on what it means to be political or have a coherent set of ideas of what precisely political in this case is. This situation could be explained through

10. Despite the tightening of the legal landscape (2013–22), some forms of more politically and policy-driven feminist initiatives were still possible such as the protest triggered by the case of the Khachaturian sisters in 2018 and decriminalization of domestic violence, which brought tremendous media visibility to the feminist movement.

11. Of course, both anti-war and anti-Putin positions were present within the Russian feminist scene even before the full-scale invasion. For instance, many feminists adopted a clear anti-regime stance and participated in protests against the occupation of Crimea in 2014. However, at that time, feminists were not perceived as the most active or significant force behind these protests, primarily participating as individual participants rather than protest organizers. Moreover, as Solovey (2021, 201) demonstrates, not all feminists during that period considered the struggle against Russian colonial aggression relevant to feminist activism. As Hrytsenko (2022) observes, some Russian feminists at that period even reproduced colonial rhetoric concerning Ukraine without encountering any significant internal criticism within the Russian feminist scene.

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pre-2022 proliferation of popular feminism, which discussed political issues, such as domestic violence or sex education, without discussing politics.

As respondents were uncertain about politics, they also highlighted the lack of political experience and skills. Many of them emphasized that they didn't have prior activist experience. And after joining FAR, they didn't always know how to behave or what to do *as activists*. Consequently, FAR became an environment where activists learned to organize, to communicate, to devise a repertoire of protest action, and other skills important for political projects. As one participant underscored:

> Actually, FAR trains activists because, well, Russian society has great difficulties with cooperation skills. . . . Everything is very atomized and there are great challenges in the area of collective action. . . . People don't really know how to do it. . . . For many FAR members, this is, in a sense, a kind of civic school where you study how people can organize themselves in the first place. (Anna, January 2023)

Furthermore, drawing on activists' insights, we underscore the ambivalent role of media in activism. Ratilainen and Zhaivoronok (2024) illustrate that while media facilitate a broad spectrum of activist practices, identities, and strategies, they simultaneously impose constraints on collective organizing and modes of expression and representation. Furthermore, Zhaivoronok (2025) contends that FAR grapples with balancing the investment in media capital, characteristic of influencer culture from the pre-2022 period, with a horizontal and collective-oriented mode of political organizing. Many interviewed activists also acknowledged the tensions arising from FAR's reliance on media as its primary infrastructure. They often felt pressured to adhere to media logic, even when it conflicted with their values or produced adverse side effects. This underscores the need for further research to understand the intricate relationship between various types of activism and the media.

Last, our monitoring of feminist media activities emphasizes that a highly polarized post-2022 Russian society features both anti-war feminist groups and pro-war initiatives, where women's agenda might be integrated into the pro-Russian propaganda (Johnson 2023). Above we illustrated the case of FAR, which is a clear-cut politically informed anti-war initiative, but it is also vital to briefly consider the other end of the spectrum, namely pro-war feminists. Interestingly, they frequently feed off the same popular forms of pre-war feminist discourse and feminist influencer culture. One example is a well-known feminist, Maria Arbatova, who became a public figure in the 1990s (Gradskova 2020). Recently, Arbatova has participated in a number of projects by younger-generation feminists such as Mingalimova's YouTube talk show and feminist YouTube series FEM IS (see Efremova 2023). And she has vocally expressed her pro-war and anti-Ukraine stance after the beginning of the full-scale invasion (Zhaivoronok 2023). Another example of how pro-war propaganda projects are appropriating feminist discourses is YouTube project "Z-Girlfriends," which mimics Mingalimova's moderately oppositional feminist YouTube project "Girlfriends," created in 2023. In other words, if it weren't for the popularity of Mingalimova's "Girlfriends," the channel "Z-Girlfriends" would not have appeared either. Such reactionary feminist initiatives constitute a novel

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development and should be taken into account, especially as they chip away at the established influencers' reputations and creative projects.

CONCLUSION

Despite the diverse, fragmented, and neoliberal nature of some of the most popular mediated feminist discourses in Russia, often lacking clear political messages and ideologies, there is no denying that celebrities, social media influencers and micro-influencers, and activists have made feminism a buzzword. Moreover, even the most apolitical and neoliberal feminist discourses have contributed to constructing a common feminist informational/discursive field or a feminist counterpublic (Fraser 1990). Paradoxically, this popularized form of feminism allowed for the introduction of certain ideological messages and feminist agendas in the mainstream, which would be impossible in the case of a collective politically-driven feminist initiative. Finally, the popularity of feminism also allowed individual feminist influencers to accumulate sufficient social and media capital, utilized to launch FAR, as discussed above. Returning to the introductory quote of this research note, we can argue that feminists, by successfully leveraging various media instruments, have been accumulating diverse resources—symbolic, media, and social—up to 2022, and were able to mobilize these resources after the full-scale invasion.

FAR aspires to establish a sustainable political feminist project, grounded in the previous development of mediated feminism in Russia. By participating in FAR, activists resist the Putin regime while developing and acquiring new activist skills. The second round of interviews with activists revealed that FAR is undergoing a process of structuration and professionalization: specific areas of activity are being assigned to individual activists, becoming their professional duties and responsibilities. Additionally, FAR organizes various educational events aimed at equipping activists with the necessary skills for organizing political projects and expanding the repertoire of political actions available to them. Based on this, we can infer that by creating professional cadres, FAR is already exerting a significant influence on the feminist scene.

Furthermore, interviews indicate that FAR's local cells in different countries interact with the local actors, including political movements and figures, media, and cultural institutions. This suggests that FAR's impact extends beyond domestic Russian context. Thus, future mapping of the anti-regime feminist activism will need to consider a diasporic aspect of feminist resistance. An insight into the anti-regime Russian-language media outlets, which are now hosted in Europe, and feminist creative resistance in Russian-language theatrical, musical, or art communities abroad can form the other possible lines of future research inquiry. These insights can be productively informed by the experiences of several previous waves of other mediated, emigrated, and/or transnational activists from Russia such as LGBTIQ+ and environmental activists (cf. Henry and Plantan 2021; Henry, Sperling, and McIntosh Sundstrom 2024).

The emergence of pro-war feminism also raises many questions: Is it a deviation from the trajectory of feminism's development before the war? Or does it represent a logical outcome of the tendencies present within certain feminist groups prior to the war? Should we expect

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a popularization of patriotic feminism or the emergence of new cultural and political forms of conservative feminist activism? It is important not to dismiss these uncomfortable forms of feminism that do not fit into the general picture of a progressive movement opposing a conservative regime (Wiedlack 2018). Moreover, by examining phenomena such as pro-war feminism, we can better understand the dynamics of feminism, or at least some of its currents, within the Russian cultural, political, and media contexts. ■

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

This research is supported by the Research Council of Finland, grant no. 341436. FEMCORUS is a Research Council of Finland–funded project on media and feminism(s) in Russia (grant no. 341436; website: https://projects.tuni.fi/femcorus/).

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Published online: August 21, 2025

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