

Inna PERHEENTUPA, *Feminist Politics in Neoconservative Russia: An Ethnography of Resistance and Resources*. Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2022, 204 p.

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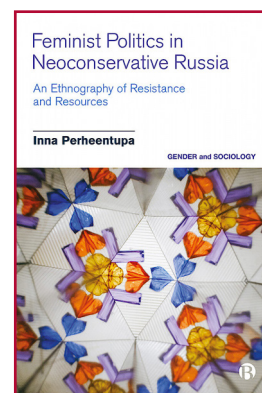
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In *Feminist Politics in Neoconservative Russia*, Inna Perheentupa offers a subtle and broad analysis of the current status of Feminist Politics in contemporary Russia. The author bases her argument on 42 interviews recorded between 2015 and 2018 and on participating in and observing feminist activism. This book enables the reader to dive into the Russian feminist resistance in the neo-conservative and authoritarian state following the central question: What are the effects of the Russian political context on feminist activism?

First, Inna Perheentupa draws a precise picture of the specific social and historical Russian context in the first two chapters. The legacy of some soviet structures and the continuity/discontinuity with the 1990's activism are very well explained. This constitutes a concise summary for scholars working on the subject or a good starting point for scholars from other fields.

In chapter 3, Inna Perheentupa discusses the duality of the feminist resistance from the activists' perspective: they both try to heal themselves as they have faced gendered violence and try to repair the social structures that produced this violence. She examines how they integrated postfeminist ideas into the activists' narratives, individualising their struggle. She also specifies how this integration stands on a specific Russian cultural background to lead women towards the acceptance of their sacrifice for the cause.

In the fourth chapter, Inna Perheentupa uses spatial metaphors —underground, shelter and street— to expose different types and goals of feminist spatial politics and to discuss the tension between opening and closing feminist space. These illustrations are effective, and, once again, the context is essential to highlight Russian feminist politics' priorities. Indeed, the author reminds us that the urge for privacy and safety for women leads to “shelter politics” —that is, to create alternative spaces and shelters in order to “keep warm during freezing political times” (p.155)— overshadowing other politics in Russia.



The two following chapters, 5 and 6, work together to reveal the internal dynamics of the feminist resistance that appear when studying their resources. In chapter 5, epistemic resources available to this resistance are examined. The author shows how a hierarchy emerges between activists with access to academic culture who often rely on queer theories and other groups of feminists that we could call radical or “gynocentric” (p.118). The author tries to overcome the opposition between the two groups by refusing the discourse on the “primitiveness”, *i.e.*, understood as an outdated theoretical frame, of radical activism and by analysing how, even though they often lack the latest epistemic resources, they rely on legitimate resources: their own experiences.

In the sixth chapter, Inna Pehrentupa discusses how access to mainstream media is challenging and needed in a context of scarcity of visibility of feminist groups. Those who manage to reach this virtual public space can define who are the real feminists and what their goals are. From this perspective, the studied hierarchy dividing activists leaning on the latest academic resources and activists following other tendencies tends not to be enough to comprehend the internal activists’ struggles for hegemony. Indeed, academics’ theoretical knowledge is not necessarily a handy tool to communicate efficiently, while people able to organise shocking and highly mediatised actions are not necessarily those with epistemic resources.

The last chapter, “Resources and Their Effect on Feminist Resistance”, is a conclusion that includes some optimistic perspectives.

Overall, the argument is well defended, and Inna Pehrentuppa draws a detailed picture of feminist politics in neoconservative Russia. We could regret that this study is centred in Moscow and Saint-Peterburg, but the feminist politics’ structure itself partially explains this focus. Moreover, the resources’ discussion would benefit from a material approach: how many activists are involved? The author could have studied the backgrounds of activists in depth to highlight who the activists engaged in Russia are. Even though this question is hard to address within the current political context without endangering activists, some tools that the author already uses, such as splitting some interviewees’ answers into several pseudonyms to protect respondents, could help conduct this study safely. Finally –this criticism being rather a wish, as the challenges it implies are significant– an analysis of the impact of feminist activism on Russian society would be necessary. Does feminist resistance manage to influence the trend towards a more patriarchal society? Are some resistance groups growing thanks to their actions? The means and structure of resistance politics need to be examined in the light of their outcome, especially under such a regime where women and LGBTQ rights are lacking and threatened.

To conclude, this relatively short book is a must for scholars of gender studies working on Russia and post-soviet space. But it is also essential reading for social movements studies and gender studies scholars studying other areas and willing to expand their

perspectives. Indeed, for most of its analysis, this publication is about more than the sole study of the Russian case: struggle over epistemic resources, forms of activism existing in neoconservative regimes, duality of feminist politics pairing therapeutical and political goals, etc. It can therefore be used as a comparative example for other local studies. Nevertheless, this book is not meant for a large audience, as the corpus is augmented by a dense amount of theoretical analysis that needs certain ease with the conceptual background to be apprehended.

The material used for this book might soon become outdated as the Russian context has been reshaping rapidly since February 2022. But this character also makes this text valuable as a milestone of feminist politics in a changing regime, where resources are scarcer and potential public spaces narrower. Inna Perheentupa's book appears as the heir to Caiazza's work (2002) and, as such, is indispensable to grasping what feminist politics are in contemporary Russia.

Inna Perheentupa manages to highlight the diversity of feminist resistance without erasing the common core they all share and invites activists to unite around what they agree on. Even if this task sometimes feels impossible, hopes are leaning on the new generations of activists. This book ends on some optimistic lines, especially on the reunification of feminists against the threats of the neoconservative hegemony that the new generations of feminists could achieve in Russia. Since February 2022, the whole movement has transformed, but this unity might happen sooner than expected under the banner of anti-militarism.

Bibliography

Caiazza, Amy. 2002. *Mothers and Soldiers. Gender, Citizenship, and Civil Society in Contemporary Russia*. New York: Routledge.

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