MOVEMENT OF MOVEMENTS: RUSSIAN ACTIVISM IN EXILE AND THE POROUS POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE

Laura A. Henry, Valerie Sperling, Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom[*]

What happens when a social movement must relocate to continue its advocacy? Such a "movement" of movements has been going on—in a partial, fragmented way— since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, raising a host of issues for Russian social movements. Past research has identified several broad trends in Russian civil society prior to the war: enduring, evaporating, and adapting forms of activism. These terms captured, respectively, organizational types that had persisted since the 1990s, those unable to survive, and those that adapted to Russia's increasingly repressive environment. This article examines a new trend in Russian civil society, escaping, in light of the concept of political opportunity structure. Specifically, we find that Russian feminist and environmental activists operating beyond Russia's borders experience a porous political opportunity structure that crosses state boundaries, creating new opportunities for activism as well as constraints.

What does it mean when a social movement must physically relocate to continue its advocacy? This "movement" of movements has been underway—in a partial, fragmented, and disorganized way—since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The relocation of many of Russia's most prominent activists, ranging from feminists and environmentalists to human rights and LGBTQ rights advocates, raises a host of issues for Russian social movements and those who support their aims.

In past research, we identified several broad trends in Russian civil society prior to the war, which we labeled *enduring*, *evaporating*, and *adapting* forms of activism (Sundstrom, Henry, and Sperling 2022). These terms captured, respectively, organizational forms of activism that had persisted since the 1990s, those forms of activism unable to survive, and those that adapted to Russia's increasingly repressive environment. Here, we examine a new trend in Russian civil society—*escaping*—a trend that gained momentum due to the departure of so many activists from Russia since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. We consider how social movement theory—specifically, the concept of "political opportunity structure"—can shed light on the dilemmas faced by Russian civil society actors by using examples from feminist and environmental activism, including their efforts opposing Russia's war on Ukraine.

Below, we argue for extending the concept of political opportunity structure (POS)—which typically characterizes the opportunities and constraints activists face within their home country—to the situation faced by social movement activists living and organizing abroad. Specifically, we find that Russian activists operating beyond Russia's borders experience a porous political opportunity structure (PPOS) that, like the activists, crosses state boundaries. We discuss this largely with regard to three aspects of POS: opportunities to influence the government and/or society given the relative level of state repression, finding political allies, and obtaining financial support. While opportunities to influence the Russian government may be minimal for activists living outside the country, Russian feminists and environmentalists abroad still try to change the society they left and, in so doing, are operating under a Russian POS in which they may be persecuted, prosecuted, or framed as extremists. Meanwhile, Russian activists living outside of Russia simultaneously operate under the POSs of their host states,

* Laura A. Henry is a Professor of Government and Legal Studies at Bowdoin College. Valerie Sperling is a Professor of Political Science at Clark University. Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom is a Professor of Political Science at the University of British Columbia. Please direct correspondence to lhenry@bowdoin.edu

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where their national identity as Russians (whether or not they embrace it) carries an historical-imperial association that may alienate their natural political allies. The resource element of POS also shifts when Russian activists operate abroad. At the same time, in the past decade, foreign funders were loath to put Russian activists in Russia at risk by supporting them and thus turning them into "foreign agents," activists living outside of Russia become essentially immune to that label and thus hypothetically easier to fund—or they may be seen as less efficacious and thus less attractive to funders. In short, in a globalized world where social movements on the right and left alike have become transnational, the borders or boundaries of states' opportunity structures have become more permeable, creating new opportunities for activists as well as constraints. We further define PPOS in the next section.

Through interviews with Russian activists who have left their home country, we take an inductive approach to exploring the following questions. What does it mean for social movement networks to partially relocate? What are the continuities and discontinuities in feminist and environmental activism that originated in Russia but now may be undertaken by geographically distant activists? More theoretically, if it is generally recognized that the POS shapes activism, what opportunities and constraints are created by a more "porous" POS for activists in their new environments?

At the most basic level, we find that relocation diversifies activism by multiplying venues for activists' efforts, whether that is continued work in Russia, activist efforts in the digital sphere, or new projects in the host country and beyond. Although the feminist activists we interviewed were more coordinated in their efforts than environmentalists, broadly, activists have devised a range of projects that appeal to different audiences and focus on different targets. Overall, we find that migration has generated a period of experimentation in activism. This experimentation and diversification are driven by activists' uncertainty about the future and differing perceptions among activists about the relevant political opportunities and threats. Opportunities rooted in multiple political systems—in Russia, in the host country, in international venues—may all be relevant at once as activists engage in work ranging from continued campaigns with movement counterparts back in Russia, organizing local initiatives in their new host country, assisting Ukrainian refugees, and lobbying for wider access to humanitarian visas. Often, they undertake more than one of these efforts at the same time. Activists also find solidarity in activism during their displacement, cultivating networks among others who have relocated.

In the following sections, we first briefly review the relevant theories related to social movements and POS and our data collection and analysis methods. Next, we provide a descriptive section reviewing various forms of activism carried out by activists who have left Russia. We then offer an analysis of factors that shape activism in exile, including political opportunities in Russia and host countries, the search for allies, and emerging opportunities for identifying resources to support activism. Finally, we consider the broader challenges of a porous POS, such as the effects of uncertainty on activism, the accumulation of social capital in host countries, and the potential for transnational repression.

WHAT SHAPES ACTIVISM IN EXILE: THEORIES EXTENDED

A social movement "is one of the principal social forms through which collectivities give voice to their grievances and concerns about the rights, welfare, and well-being of themselves and others by engaging in various types of collective action . . . all of which dramatize those grievances and concerns and demand that something be done about them" (Snow et al. 2018: 1). These collectivities are dynamic and shifting aggregations of organizations, networks, and individual activists. Social movements emerge to demand political and social change, often—but not always—targeting governments. In addition to instrumental goals, such as changes to laws, policies, or deeply rooted social practices, activists participating in social movements may pursue expressive

goals—seeking the psychological benefits of solidarity and social gains through enhancing their reputation within relevant networks (Chong 1991).

Social movement activism does not occur in a vacuum. While activists are agents working for political and social change, they are inevitably enabled and constrained by the systems in which they live. The political process model has provided a foundation for a significant amount of social movement research over the past four decades (McAdam 1982; Tarrow 1994). The strength of the model—and source of some weaknesses as well—stems from how it combines factors, including political opportunities, activists' framing of ideas, and mobilizing structures and resources. While there have been many critiques of the political process model—most notably that it errs too much on the side of structure over agency (Goodwin and Jasper 1999) and that it most effectively explains social movements in democratic contexts (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; for a counterexample, see Alimi 2009)—the approach still provides a valuable starting place for understanding how context shapes activism.

In the political process approach, several key factors influence, but do not determine, activism. Mobilizing organizations and networks channel resources and provide an institutional base to a movement (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Activists' effective framing of grievances can change the public's level of concern by articulating the problem and assigning blame (Snow et al. 1986). In this article, we focus more narrowly on the role of a third set of factors—political opportunity structure. The POS is the "consistent—but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national—dimensions of the political environment which either encourage or discourage people from using collective action" (Tarrow 1994: 18). The POS offers a set of incentives for activists that they need to navigate as they work to achieve their aims. Changing the political system—making it more democratic, for example—also may be one of activists' broader goals. The POS is often characterized as relatively open or closed to social movement demands based on different political indicators, including the degree of access to the policymaking process, the availability of elite allies, and the state's repressive capacity. Political institutions and alignments that are more open to participation generally offer a more favorable context for activism, while closed or repressive contexts are unfavorable. In practice, most systems offer a mix of openings and obstacles. Moreover, political opportunities, available resources, and persuasive framing are not objective categories but depend on the perceptions of networked individuals who make strategic choices based on their own assessments (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001).

Given Russia's slide from semiauthoritarianism to full authoritarianism in recent years (Frye 2022; Smyth 2020; Gel'man 2015), we also recognize that arguably, threats are just as relevant as opportunities in activists' calculus of how they can best generate political and social change. We see the POS not as determinative of either activists' chosen strategies or the outcomes of activism but as presenting a more or less difficult context they need to navigate. Russian activists who have persisted in their work since the 20112012 Bolotnaya protests against election fraud, which served as a critical juncture for the regime's increasingly repressive approach to civil society, by definition, have learned to adapt to an unfavorable political context. These activists both seek to create new openings and avoid threats. They also may differ in their assessment of opportunities at any given time. Some may decide it is time to exit the political system, for example, while others choose to remain. Activists' differing perceptions contribute to the challenge of coordinating social movement activism.

When activists are in their home country, the basic elements of the POS may be relatively familiar—although a period of rapid political change may create more uncertainty or disagreement about the characteristics of the POS. Within the domestic political context, the POS may vary significantly depending on the level of politics or issue area. The government might be more receptive to citizen demands on some matters than others—for example, on issues that are not perceived as antiregime. Activists may also find it easier to work at the local or regional level rather than nationally due to a more pragmatic and less politicized governing context.

Moreover, scholars of social movements have long recognized that domestic political systems are not isolated and that social movement activists work within an "international opportunity structure" as well as a domestic one (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Sperling 1999). In this sense, the domestic POS is nested in a global context, and activists may strategically engage in a "scale shift" to enhance their effectiveness (Alimi 2009). Many activists pursue global opportunities, particularly when home country options to make demands or initiate campaigns are limited (Henry and Sundstrom 2021). However, activists in exile do not necessarily choose transnational activism as their strategy; rather, they find themselves thrust into a quasi-transnational setting by circumstances. Likewise, their status as migrants creates conditions of transience and liminality that raise important questions about whether POS remains a relevant analytical lens and how it might be usefully modified.

While Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink's "boomerang" model described the way that human rights activists in one country could create a more advantageous POS by mobilizing a "transnational advocacy network" (TAN) of foreign activist allies (who, in turn, could lobby their own governments to pressure the original country's government to change its oppressive behavior), this does not adequately describe the situation in which activists in self-selected exile find themselves trying to effectuate social change. First, Keck and Sikkink's model proposed that the "target state" for change needed to be vulnerable to pressure through moral or material leverage exercised by a TAN (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 23). In the Russian case, the target state—a nuclear-armed, oil-producing dictatorship that has withdrawn from the Council of Europe and violated not only the human rights of its citizens but also the sovereignty of its neighboring state, Ukraine—has significant material power and no perceptible reputational concerns that would pressure it to change its behavior. Second, the primary audience of Russian activists is Russian society, not a network of foreign activists abroad. To the extent that Russian activists seek to affect state behavior, their efforts are largely directed at the governments of their host countries and the European Union, not to pressure Russia but to support Ukraine and/or provide more humanitarian visas for their compatriots. Finally, unlike the boomerang model, in this scenario, the Russian activists currently seeking support for their causes are themselves living abroad alongside their potential international allies. These "escaping" activists are thus engaged in an international opportunity structure, which is quite different from that posited by Keck and Sikkink.

A different subsection of the scholarly literature on migration and diaspora politics has investigated how citizens who have left their country continue to attempt to influence politics at home (Shain 2005; Heindl 2013). Some studies of those who "exit" a political system yet continue to exercise "voice" have drawn on Albert O. Hirschman's well-known typology (Hirschman 1970; Pfaff 2006; Ahmadov and Sasse 2016). Other scholars have looked at the "political remittances" of migrants sending home funds, ideas, and discourses (Krawatzek and Müller-Funk 2020; Fomina 2022). Another group of scholars examines diaspora efforts to promote regime change, support one side in a violent conflict, and provide humanitarian relief (Quinsaat 2019; Moss 2020). Scholars also increasingly recognize that diaspora and other transnationally linked movements can use digital spaces to maintain collective identities and communication, but that online activism still occurs within real-world contexts (Sorce and Dumitrica 2022; Castells 2015). The concept of POS could be extended to more effectively engage the literature on activism after migration to understand how these efforts develop and when they are likely to be effective.

What is the POS for Russian activists in exile? Given that they are no longer organizing their efforts in their home country yet often are still targeting their home country's population and, to a lesser extent, its government, they may find themselves in a context of overlapping or interacting opportunities and challenges. The persistence of and challenges to domestic activism in Russia in recent years have been well-documented (Daphnis 2024; Evans 2023; Dollbaum 2022; Plantan 2022). Activists who have left the country must consider ongoing political-legal constraints in Russia, the political conditions in their host country, and the pos-

sibility of collaborating with transnational partners. Also, activist networks and campaigns encompassing exiles may rely even more on the digital sphere beyond any single country.[1] Combining these elements with the ongoing regional instability inherent in Russia's war in Ukraine makes clear that the context for activism may be highly uncertain. Under these circumstances, is POS still a useful analytical category, or does it risk oversimplifying a complex reality? Does the experience of leaving Russia automatically make activists more "transnational" and more likely to see themselves as part of international movements—or might they remain mostly in the same networks as in the past, despite that their locations are clearly no longer bounded nationally?

To answer these questions, we propose an extension of the POS model, taking into account the novel situation of activists located between multiple political worlds. The porous political opportunity structure (PPOS) multiplies the opportunities, constraints, and risks such activists face. In physically leaving their home country, they do not leave its domestic POS; it continues to permeate their choices as activists who must decide which issues to prioritize and whether their tactics will endanger them or their colleagues still in Russia. Nor do activists necessarily lose their closely knit networks that comprise the broader movement when they leave. Once abroad, they may be physically distanced from their former activist colleagues but still connected through digital campaigns and social media channels, even while engaging in new activist fields in their host states—albeit typically with other Russian activists rather than locals. The boundaries of "exiled" activists' multiple communities are thus also porous. Meanwhile, in seeking out political allies in their host states, the activists' "Russian-ness" and attendant sentiments about Russia's imperial history also "leak" into their host country's POS; this creates opportunities to bond with other Russians in exile but complicates the creation of otherwise logical alliances in the host state.

Finally, the relationship of funders to activists abroad is also inseparable from their citizenship as Russians—this permeates the considerations of funders trying to decide whether to support Russian activists in exile (as potential returnees who may bring democracy to Russia in the future) or pass them over in favor of bolstering Russians who remained in the country. In short, activists abroad simultaneously exist in their host state's political context while their activism is largely directed at and conditioned by the political opportunities and constraints of their home state. Analyzing the political opportunity structure as "porous" helps extend the concept's utility for activists and social movements who straddle state borders under duress.

METHODOLOGY

Our findings are based on twenty-six semistructured interviews with Russian activists and non-Russian donors to Russian civil society organizations between April and July 2023 (see table 1 on the next page). The authors manually coded the interview transcripts to identify recurring themes that interviewees raised related to POS. Most interviews with activists were conducted in person in Tbilisi, Georgia, or Berlin, Germany, and several interviews included more than one participant. However, a handful of interviews took place on a remote platform. The interviews ranged from thirty to ninety minutes and were conducted in Russian or English according to the interviewees' preferences.[2]

Given the inherent instability of exile, Russian activists who left their home country may relocate within and across countries. Our study selected Georgia and Germany as cases that offered different environments for Russian migrant-activists. Significant numbers of Russian activists relocated to each country (albeit in much higher numbers to Georgia than to Germany) (Korableva 2023; Deutsch Welle 2022). Georgia is a post-Soviet state, with twenty percent of its territory occupied by the Russian military due to earlier conflicts. While Georgia offers a relatively low barrier to entry for Russian citizens (no travel visa required), a substantial Russian-speaking minority, and is viewed by many dissidents as freer than other potential visa-

free destinations, the Georgian public is largely anti-Russian and pro-Ukrainian, even as the Georgian government's foreign policy is more ambivalent. By contrast, as an EU state with a stable democracy and strong economy, as well as an established procedure for granting political asylum to Russian dissidents, Germany is a more desirable (yet more difficult to access) destination for migrating Russian activists. Historically, Germany also had more political and cultural distance from Russia (including a less apprehensive local population). Given uncertainties related to legal status or income, some activists in both countries acknowledged that they were likely to relocate again.

Table 1. List and Description of Interviewees [a]

Interview number	*Number. of Interviewees Present*	*Primary Issue Area for Activism*	*Location of Interview*	*Language of Interview* [b]
2	2	Environment	Tbilisi	English
3	1	Feminism	Tbilisi	Russian
4	1	Feminism	Tbilisi	Russian
5	1	Environment	Tbilisi	Russian
6	5	Political Opposition	Tbilisi	Russian
7	2	Environment	Tbilisi	Russian
8	1	Politics/Feminism	Tbilisi	English
9	1	Environment	Tbilisi	English
10	1	Environment	Tbilisi	Russian
11	1	Feminism	Tbilisi	Russian
12	1	Feminism	Tbilisi	English
13	1	Feminism	Berlin	English
14	1	Feminism	Berlin	Russian
15	2	Environment	Berlin	Russian
16	1	Environment	Berlin	English
17	1	LGBTQ Rights	Berlin	English
18	1	Human rights	Remote	English
19	1	Human rights	Remote	English
20	1	Feminism/LGBTQ	Remote	Russian
21	1	Environment	Remote	Russian
22	1	Environment	Remote	English
23	1	Disability Rights	Remote	Russian
24	1	Feminism	Remote	Russian

Notes: [a] Interviews were conducted in Tbilisi, Berlin, or on a remote platform. Three background interviews conducted with international civil-society funders are not included in this list. [b] Quotations from Russian language interviews included in this article have been translated by the authors.

We used our existing networks, based on the authors' longstanding research on the Russian feminist and environmental movements, to identify activists who had relocated to Tbilisi and Berlin. We then asked these interviewees to recommend other activists—in effect, a modified form of snowball sampling. Activism across our two issue areas varied in interesting ways. Most of our feminist interviewees were part of the Feminist Antiwar Resistance (FAR) network, while our environmentalist interviewees belonged to a wider variety of organizations and initiatives. Comparing activism on these broad issue categories enables us to gain some variation in the

original POS that they faced in Russia, where many environmental activists saw themselves as less ideological and less clearly antiregime than did the feminist activists. The comparison to FAR activists was even more stark, as FAR's explicit opposition to the war soon led to the Russian government branding several activists as "foreign agents" and later as leaders of an "undesirable" organization; the "political" element of their activity was undeniable. Finally, feminist ideology has as one of its principles the notion that "the personal is political." Feminist campaigns often transcend geographic location, while environmentalism is frequently attached to specific local ecosystems and neighborhoods. It can be construed (though not always) as an apolitical effort to protect the environment and human/animal life, even though it may involve working with and pressuring governments. Despite these differences, all the activists we interviewed concluded that they had to leave Russia for personal safety, conscience, or both.

Based on our qualitative data, we consider how leaving Russia affects activism broadly in terms of its form. We then apply the PPOS concept as we consider activists' assessment and response to changing opportunities and constraints. Finally, we briefly explore interesting yet inconclusive differences between Russian environmental and feminist activism abroad.

MIGRATION FROM RUSSIA AFTER THE FULL-SCALE INVASION OF UKRAINE

Russia's assault on Ukraine in February 2022 was accompanied by the further shrinkage of public space for political activism inside Russia itself. New laws increased the penalties for antiwar protest, and between February and December 2022, more than 20,000 people were arrested for political reasons (OVD-Info 2022). The Russian government also stepped up its identification of so-called "foreign agents." In July 2022, one of the original criteria—receiving foreign funding—was reduced to a vague implication of being under foreign "influence" (RFE/RL 2022).

The escalation in repression and the danger of mobilization pushed hundreds of thousands of Russians to depart for other countries. A year after the war began, estimates of the number of Russians who had left ranged from 500,000 to almost four million, many taking up residence in nearby Georgia, Armenia, Latvia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan (Freedom House 2023; Darieva and Golova 2023). Some of those who left soon after the invasion were civic activists, although many activists also remained in Russia for reasons ranging from family obligations and economic constraints to moral conviction.

In theory, activists abroad should enjoy new opportunities like freedom of speech and assembly in a more democratic political context. While the Russian regime perhaps considers the exit of activists to be a "safety valve" (releasing oppositionists to a location where they will cause the regime less harm), it may instead constitute a new opportunity for Russians to exercise "voice" and influence both in their new location and, indirectly, back at home in Russia (Henry and Plantan 2022). However, the exodus also means that activist networks have been disrupted. Many activists experience personal and professional dislocation and conflicts may arise between activists who left and their counterparts in Russia as their local contexts differ. Moreover, leaving does not guarantee that activists will successfully avoid repression (Freedom House 2021).

Whether they are called migrants, exiles, or *relokanty*, the departure of so many active and engaged citizens creates challenges for networks of activists who want to promote change inside Russia. The war has not dampened concerns about pressing social issues. For example, a Levada Center poll in September 2022 showed that the vast majority of the population continued to regard environmental issues and domestic violence as serious problems (Levada Center 2022). Whether the change activists seek is issue-based or explicitly antiwar, the challenges of communicating and coordinating movement efforts transnationally are immense. At the same time, activists—especially those who have persisted in their work despite the hostile context of Russia's political system since 2012—are often dedicated, persistent, creative, and adaptive. They are experimenting with strategies to address these challenges in real time.

HOW RELOCATION AFFECTS SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: WHAT IS ACTIVISM IN EXILE?

Our interviewees revealed varied forms of activism that we have characterized broadly as diversification and experimentation—in many cases, simply a further development of changing activism strategies over the past decade. While some of our activist interviewees had become more or newly active only after leaving Russia, most had been activists for years prior to their departure. Many activists reported that they first became involved in activism related to elections in Russia—either taking part in the 2011-2012 Bolotnaya protests following revelations of widespread voter fraud in the December 2011 Duma (parliamentary) election (interviews 4, 6, 11, 14, 17, 23) or protests regarding the 2019 Moscow city Duma elections in which many opposition candidates were prevented from running (interviews 6, 16). Other political catalysts for activism included disagreement with Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 (interviews 7, 17) and protests around other major events, such as high-profile legal cases like that against Pussy Riot (interview 11) or the Khachaturyan sisters (interview 4), or the imprisonment of Alexei Navalny (interview 16).

For activists who were part of the political opposition in Russia, the initial goal of their efforts was to change the system of government in Russia as a whole. As one interviewee stated, "The first activism I started was political activism because I thought—I still think actually—… that changes in the area that I was interested in are not possible until we change the whole system, right? So that was my idea, that's why I went into this election activism" (interview 17). This period of relative idealism about the power of activism to change the path of an increasingly authoritarian regime now looked naive to some. "It seems to me that we had the illusion that we would directly influence the authorities, that we would be noticed if we were loud enough. Well, it's not an illusion, but at some point, a completely closed state does not hear us at all" (interview 3). After exile, while activism may still be directed toward criticizing the Russian government, unreceptive government officials are no longer the main audience for activists' efforts (interview 14).

Activists working from exile direct their campaigns toward diverse audiences (interviews 11, 20). A feminist activist proposed that one key target group was Russian citizens at home who have not been politicized: "Our activity is aimed only at society because we do not have any leverage over the state at this stage. . . . Our goals are to tell more people, to convey to them why this war is not beneficial for them" (interview 4). Another feminist activist stated that they target a largely female audience, specifically those who have "an unarticulated and disapproving position regarding the war" (interview 14). However, an environmentalist noted the difficulties of working with Russian citizens from afar: "I have this feeling that Russian society is in a depressive mood, and I don't like that. I want to change that, and I want to find instruments to change that, but I was trying something, and [it was] not working out all the time because the situation is getting worse and worse every month, and people are trying to adapt to this new situation" (interview 16).

At the other end of the spectrum, activists may direct their efforts toward host country politicians, focusing on antiwar and humanitarian goals (interview 11, 17). Examples include demonstrations in Germany to raise awareness about Russian citizens who are at risk and need support (interviews 13, 15) and participation in Tbilisi protests against a proposed foreign agent law for Georgia (interview 4). An LGBTQ rights activist was directing their efforts toward European politicians in an effort to change host-country laws on humanitarian refugees and work at the EU level. In regard to an art exhibit in Brussels, they suggested that the audience was not so much the public because: "mostly we want politicians to know about it and change the [visa] regulations" (interview 17). Other activists suggested European leaders were not particularly interested in them or their cause. Referring to German politicians, an interviewee stated, "They are afraid to have business with activists. But it would be nice to work with them

because I think I have some ideas, and I would appreciate some help on a political level to make them happen" (interview 16).

Reaching out to host country governments is often challenging. An environmentalist in Georgia noted, "I think that the idea of the whole ecosystem of volunteering communities is that everyone should focus on what they are the best at. For example, as an immigrant, I lack language knowledge—and most people in our community lack language knowledge—of Georgian laws. So, I think we are least effective in doing this legal stuff, unfortunately, because this is a really important part of the problem. But we are good at … generating crowded events, we are good at sorting recyclables, and we are good at technology" (interview 9). Another environmentalist echoed this point: "[We don't see] good potential to work with the government here for now, unfortunately, so mostly we concentrate on businesses and some organizations, less on the government level" (interview 7).

Activists' audiences also may be more narrow—internal to the movement or even to other activists in exile. Much of activists' attention was directed toward their own networks in the first year and a half following the full-scale invasion. Communication through Telegram channels and other platforms was and remains vital in retaining networks and providing practical advice as individuals are thrust into new, unfamiliar living and working situations (interviews 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14). Monitoring recent developments, maintaining solidarity, and identifying new goals and strategies require intensive communication among potentially geographically remote activists. In some cases, these networks are increasingly communities of communication rather than communities of physical interaction.

Others are forging new activist communities in exile with more face-to-face interaction (interviews 5, 9, 23). One activist referred to this as "shifting to the microscale," stating, "When we say 'activism,' it always seems like it's something unbearably gigantic, but in fact, it's a huge number of small things that we do every day, and a huge number of small things that we try to do differently, and not the way we were taught" (interview 23). An environmental activist who organizes local park clean-ups in Tbilisi stated, "The majority of people [who attended the clean-up events] were those who just came to a new country, and they wanted to build their social networks and to participate in some initiative. They felt this urge to—how do you describe this?—to do something and see the result. In Russia, many people were missing the feeling that you can just come up with an idea and implement it. [Here] you don't have to get permission from some kind of authorities, and you don't have this feeling that everything is prohibited by default like in Russia" (interview 9). Physical gatherings, such as those for collecting trash, allowed like-minded individuals to meet and cultivate solidarity. It also offered a means to visibly give back to the host community and perhaps offset some of the negative "baggage" that came with being seen as a Russian "occupier" in Georgia.

Social movements in exile may also differ in the degree of coherence of their organizing networks. The Feminist Anti-War Resistance (FAR)—from which we drew several interviewees—is an egalitarian, nonhierarchical network of autonomous cells inside and outside of Russia; it formed just after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and directed particular attention to the impact of the war on women and queer people. FAR's manifesto explicitly condemned the war, explaining that, as feminists and Russian citizens, they vehemently opposed Russia's war of aggression and upheld Ukraine's sovereignty, and urged feminists in Russia and abroad to "actively oppose the war and the government that started it" (Feminist Anti-War Resistance 2022). Early on, FAR's actions included street demonstrations, but as the Russian government rapidly escalated its repression, activists turned more to internet-based protest. With tens of thousands of followers on their social media channels, FAR posted images of protest actions around the country. These included artistic street actions like Mariupol-5000, where participants made grave markers and photographed them in the courtyards of their apartment buildings to symbolically represent the burials of citizens killed in Russia's devastating attacks on the Ukrainian city of Mariupol. (Those attacks made it nearly impossible for people to venture out and bury their relatives in cemeteries.) Other eye-catching protest

tactics included "guerilla" stickering and other creative methods of countering Russian propaganda about the war, such as writing "no to war" on Russian coins and banknotes and featuring Ukrainian women's stories on FAR's social media. FAR also organized psychological support for activists facing persecution and works with groups offering humanitarian aid to Ukrainian civilians, as well as collaborating with other organizations to help Russian antiwar activists safely exit the country when faced with government repression. FAR took an actively decolonial perspective, critiquing discrimination against non-Russian ethnic groups inside Russia as well as Russian imperialism abroad. None of this activism went unnoticed; in December 2022, the Russian Ministry of Justice added the Feminist Antiwar Resistance to the foreign agent list. In October 2023, more than eighteen months after its formation, FAR's Telegram channel had more than 36,000 subscribers, and despite a variety of challenges, FAR had maintained its international network. In April 2024, the Russian government designated it as an "undesirable organization."

In contrast to coordinated efforts by the feminists we interviewed, environmentalists have been somewhat more fragmented in their activism and less uniform in their commitment to an oppositional position (interviews 15, 16, 22). While they may participate in Telegram channels discussing persistent and emerging environmental challenges, they are less likely to try to unify around a single message or to take coordinated action. One environmentalist criticized his own movement in this regard:

> Environmental activists are now in a situation when our movement didn't really speak against repression or against war. There are just a few people who are speaking against it, but as a movement, we didn't do this. So, we cannot really expect a lot of the donors that would come up and say, 'Oh, you are from this movement, so we want to give you money, so you continue your important work.' No. I mean, it's the case for human rights [activists], who've been resisting quite a lot, and it's the case for political opposition, but not with the environmental movement (interview 15).

Nevertheless, environmental activists in several countries have collaborated on the Ukraine War Environmental Consequences Work Group, which distributes data and articles online about the ecological impact of the war.

ANALYSIS: CHANGING CONTEXTS FOR ACTIVISM

How have changes to activists' political context, moving from Russia into exile, shaped feminist and environmental activism? By leaving an increasingly authoritarian and repressive system, in theory activists may gain new opportunities to organize in more democratic host countries. Some scholars have characterized this as a potential increase in "voice after exit" (Moss 2020; Henry and Plantan 2022), drawing on Hirschman's well-known heuristic of actors' response to grievance (Hirschman 1970; Hirschman 1978). Depending on the issue addressed, however, activists may identify several targets and several audiences—in Russia, in exile communities, or internationally. As a result, activists who have migrated may perceive opportunities and threats differently, depending on where they "locate" their activism politically. This partly depends on the context most relevant to their ongoing work: Russia, the host country, the transnational sphere, or digital spaces.

Regardless of their target audience and its location, the political context was a recurring theme in our interviews, although it was not always mentioned overtly. One activist captured the ubiquity but also the invisible pervasiveness of the political realm, commenting, "My position is you cannot be out of the politics, and politics is everywhere. . . . So, we need to understand who made that politics, why, how we can influence it" (interview 7). In other words, the POS continues to be a key element of organizing, irrespective of an activist's geographical location in relation to their home country. Below, we review some overlapping aspects of the porous political opportunity structure (PPOS) for activists in exile.

Political Opportunities in Russia

Interviewees drew different conclusions about the political context's role in shaping their activism in Russia prior to February 2022. While most of our interviewees had left not long after that point, a few had left even earlier. An activist who left Russia before the wider war began remarked, "After Crimea, everyone is like, 'Yeah, our president is great again,' and I'm like, 'I'm just done with this country.' … [P]olitical activism, for whom I'm doing this? For my country, for these people? They don't need it" (interview 17).

Other activists continued to work in Russia until the full-scale invasion (interviews 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 13, 16, 22). Up to that point, while they did not necessarily feel efficacious, they also did not feel themselves at immediate risk. An environmental activist remarked, "Before the full-scale invasion, I didn't feel threatened. I feel like I was doing and writing a lot of critical things, but then I was also kind of known and respected in all of this community. . . . And it's also that our topics have been marginal for so many years. . . . But then, since the war started, I was obviously against the war. I signed all the open letters and petitions, and I spoke openly against the war in the first few days. And then all this legislation came into power, which also said, now you cannot criticize [the war], you can get sued for saying something which could be disinformation or whatever" (interview 22).

While many continued their activism in Russia until their departure, some only realized in retrospect the extent to which shrinking civic space in Russia had weighed upon them psychologically. An activist in Germany highlighted the joy of experiencing a basic freedom "to just freely express yourself without being afraid of getting detained" (interview 13). One in Tbilisi noted, with reference to the time before February 2022, the contrast between working in Russia and abroad:

> Well, there were some limitations that were introduced [in Russia], but this kind of was happening at a slow pace, and you just really didn't notice that you were starting to be more silent on some questions. But it changed a lot with COVID because they banned all legal rallies or protests during the COVID time. But when the limitations were canceled, they still kept this limitation [on protest], and no official rally would be left unattacked by police. . . . Living in Georgia, I started reflecting on this previous experience, and not just me but many people noticed that we grew so accustomed to not speaking freely in Russia. So, we basically have to kind of treat ourselves, to cure ourselves from it now. To live in Georgia and speak freely is a good thing. I was thrilled to come to a legal rally here against the war, against Putin, and seeing no army of policemen and these police wagons, like in Moscow, where I felt that my city was occupied when . . . I attended some rallies, even legal ones (interview 9).

The PPOS perspective suggests that exiting Russia does not mean fully escaping the country's political context, particularly if an activist still wants to influence Russian citizens. Having left Russia, activists may find themselves or their movement subject to government disinformation campaigns back home. A feminist activist reflected on the Russian public's misunderstanding of feminists who left Russia in protest after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine: "You can see lots of people kind of mirroring the propagandist message: that people who went abroad, they're living their best lives, they don't care, you know, they're . . . living off of grants, huge grants" (interview 12). At the same time, exile communities may also provide an impetus to further activism, as individuals bring their activist impulses with them when they cross the Russian border. As an environmentalist in Tbilisi noted, "What is certain is that now there is a more active political crowd around me, well, simply because all the active ones went to Georgia, and everyone who wanted to somehow wait it out and relax went somewhere to Bali" (interview 5).

Activists held varying views on their capacity to influence politics at home in Russia. Generally, compared to the environmentalists we interviewed, the feminists had a clearer and more widely shared theory of power that analyzed the Russian regime as a particular mani-

festation of militarized patriarchy (interviews 11, 14, 23). Over the past decade, Russian conservatives have increasingly claimed that feminism is a Western export at odds with Russia's cultural traditions, and, in a 2023 "documentary" film-screed called "Femki," they have even characterized FAR leaders as terrorists.[3] Inside the FAR network, feminists also embraced decoloniality as an approach to analyzing power relations and considering the kinds of changes that will be necessary in postwar Russian society. This critique was captured by a project that a feminist in Berlin initiated. She remarked,

> It's called "Feminist Approaches to Postwar Justice." This is a project for antiwar activists and activists from Russia about approaches to peacebuilding. In general, what role does the antiwar movement have after [the war], or how we understand the world with an attempt to offer a broader view not as about military safety, but as about life safety? . . . And how various military defeats or wars then influenced society, the formation of some discourses? There is also decolonial discourse (interview 14).

For many feminists in FAR, imagining a future Russian politics entailed a consciousness about Russia's colonial relationships with external states and Russia's many marginalized peoples.

Environmentalists tended to have a more varied and often less precise analysis of Russia's political system. Indeed, some felt that environmental protection was an inherently patriotic act designed to preserve Russia's landscapes and biodiversity (interview 10). Several environmentalists (while still in Russia) had maintained close relations with politicians at the regional and municipal levels, where they helped to carry out useful research and write reports, leading them to conclude that they had a constructive role to play even as the regime grew more repressive (interviews 10, 22). Relocation abroad can be particularly disorienting for environmentalists whose work was tied to a particular place or ecosystem. One environmentalist now located in Berlin suggested that, both at home and in exile, his fellow activists had been insufficiently politicized. First, he remarked, "I think we really achieved a lot in Russia. We've been unique in the way of balancing between doing quite radical things and actually changing the situation in Russia. I mean, we changed a few laws, for example, including federal laws" (interview 15). However, he then offered the following analysis:

> I think the big concern of the Russian political regime was that civil society is so independent it could organize people against the government. This is what Putin wanted to avoid very much. . . . Most of the people were afraid, and they were saying, "No, no, we want to keep distance from our politics." And I mean, the funny thing is that [for] all our [Russian NGOs'] history, we were saying like we want to be distanced from politics. We never wanted to take part in elections or cooperate with any political parties or help any politicians with anything. It was always part of our strategy. We never wanted to be involved in politics, but we became the first environmental group [to be designated as a] foreign agent, even if we never cooperated with any politicians, and never been involved in any elections. And then we understood that it just doesn't make sense anymore to pretend that you were involved or not involved in politics. Because, I mean, when we became foreign agents, it just became clear that the government doesn't really care whether you are involved in politics or not (interview 15).

Another environmentalist concurred, citing the example of Russian Greenpeace leaders who seemed to think that they could continue working on environmental protections after February 2022 and avoid being overtly "political" on the war (interview 16). But despite their strategic rhetorical maneuvering, in 2023, the Russian government declared Greenpeace an "undesirable organization" and forced it to close its office.

Several activists also noted the painful dilemmas in trying to continue their activism while living outside Russia. These stemmed from continued repressive politics afflicting their activist colleagues who remained in Russia (interviews 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 20). Russia's domestic POS increased the challenges of continuing to collaborate with Russian activists in several ways. For instance, living abroad meant (due to Russia's low-information and high-censorship

environment) that activists abroad could not have a fully accurate understanding of the situation on the ground for activists in Russia and that often they could not publicly express shared political positions since activists inside Russia could not be explicitly antiwar without risking imprisonment. Several activists also mentioned the difficulty of managing online platforms that were penetrated by pro-government actors and others intent on monitoring their conversations (interviews 11, 12, 22). Some activists in Georgia expressed concern about new forms of transnational repression directed at migrants in particular (interview 6, 9, 16). In short, in the context of a transnationally porous POS, Russian state repression affected activists at home as well as those living and organizing abroad.

The Political Context of Host Countries

If activists choose not to target the Russian government—whether because they see doing so as risky, pointless, or both—they are, in essence, partially removing themselves from the usual understanding of a domestic POS. While the first and most desirable goal of activists abroad might be to change the policies and laws of Russia, given the unfavorable Russian POS and their own position outside of the country's borders, it is difficult to do so directly. Those who remain activists are thus confronted with the need to identify a plan B amid political and personal uncertainty. And they must do so within the constraints of the political context and POS of their new location—even as their activism is not separable from the POS in Russia or Russia's geopolitical relationship with the host country. We use the term "porous" or PPOS to help capture this situation.

Host countries may vary significantly in terms of their political institutions, state-society relations, activist communities, and foreign policy. These differences are stark in our two cases. Russians fleeing to Georgia were migrating to another "post-Soviet" state bordering their home country and to a more affordable economic context. However, the more "intimate" relations between the populations of these two formerly Soviet countries are complex. Georgians experienced Russian colonization and Soviet domination and strongly resisted Russification over the past two centuries. Approximately twenty percent of Georgia's territory is currently comprised of breakaway regions that are financially supported by Russia and occupied by Russian troops. As a result, anti-Russian sentiment is high among the Georgian population, who largely support Ukraine in the current war, as evidenced by pervasive anti-Russian graffiti and signage in restaurants and other public places. Russians who migrate to Germany live in a wealthier and more stable political system where the issue of migration is controversial but less fraught. Germany's more developed media environment also provides an opportunity to access international audiences (interview 16, 20).

More generally, new host countries might not be amenable to activism by exiles or even to the long-term presence of Russians. In Tbilisi, several activists noted that they advertise and recruit the local population to their actions (cleaning up local parks, encouraging recycling) via social media using the Georgian and English languages rather than Russian to broaden their appeal and not activate anti-Russian sentiment and risk coming across as imperialist to local audiences (interviews 5, 7, 9). Others organized antiwar protests among the Russian community in Tbilisi, in part strategically to demonstrate their solidarity with the antiwar views of the Georgian population (interview 6). These choices reflect the porosity of the host country POS for Russian activists, where their Russian identity affects the way their presence may be framed politically.

Some Russian activists using this strategy believed it was effective, as they felt welcomed at protests against a proposed foreign agent law in Tbilisi during the summer of 2023 (interview 4). However, others were more skeptical of their long-term prospects, with one activist describing worries about their status in Georgia as "very painful" (interview 6). An environmentalist in Tbilisi, for example, expressed concern about the likelihood of the Georgian government's ongoing openness to activists from Russia:

> Many volunteers, including myself, are thinking about moving from Georgia to another place. We are concerned about the political situation in Georgia, whether they will introduce visas, whether they will let us in after a visa run to another country [a necessary trip across the border to renew a visa] or not because this happens all the time, that people get refused from entering Georgia for the second time with no apparent reason, just some obscure security reasons. So, founding an organization if you are not sure that next year you're going to live there is not something you want to do (interview 9).

Due to shifting rules and changing enforcement of the visa regime and work permits, some activists in exile felt their current location to be temporary (interviews 4, 6, 10, 11). As a result of the PPOS, investing in local activism did not always make sense.

Finding allies in the host country—a key element of POS as traditionally conceived—also is not a given. In thinking about allies broadly, some activists— particularly feminists—adopted an explicitly "decolonial" awareness of not wanting to draw attention or resources from Ukraine or to put Russian activists "ahead" of Ukrainian activists in their organizing (interviews 14, 23). Even aside from Russian activists' desire to distance themselves from imperialism, finding allies in their host countries is complicated due to the PPOS of situational politics. Russian activists' "natural" ideological allies may not be available due to cleavages on other issues. For instance, both Russian feminist and environmentalist activists' allies in Georgia would naturally be on the left of the political spectrum, but Georgia's left-wing or opposition politicians and activists are largely anti-Russian. As one activist in Tbilisi put it:

> We are liberal Russians who are against war, against Putin. And Georgian opposition is also against war and against Putin. But Georgian opposition is for introducing visas and limitations against Russians. But the Georgian opposition is also welcoming Russian activists to come to their rallies against so-called foreign agent laws. So, this is so complicated, and what makes me feel that I'd better move to another place (interview 9).

A representative of a Georgian environmental organization noted that her staff members were reluctant to cooperate with Russian environmentalists living in the country, even on shared goals (interview 2). In short, although Russian activists had left their home country, their national identity infused the POS of their host countries, complicating a key element of the new POS in which they operated.

This POS "porosity" also affected Russian activists' alliances in Berlin. In Germany, the political left is fractured by the war in Ukraine, with left-wing pacifism winning out over the desire to support Ukrainians. This position clashes with that of most of the Russian activist exiles among our interviewees, who unreservedly support Ukraine and regard a position against arming Ukraine as unacceptable. One feminist interviewee in Berlin put it this way:

> What makes me really sad, or frustrated, is how, for example, this left-wing community of Berlin, maybe Germany . . . in this particular war, it's kind of sometimes pro-Russia, sometimes very pacifist and in the [sense] that [they say] "Let's just stop supporting Ukraine and let's see what happens, it's not our war." Very, I would say, selfish in a way. Very selfish. That's what makes me really sad. Even the parties in Germany, which I kind of liked, they are making these wrong choices. This agenda is really frustrating. I think people from our side are just trying to change it and somehow, I don't know, try to confront it. It also gives you the fuel to keep opposing it because it won't go away. If you shut up, then everyone just accepts that point of view, and you have to continue to be that way. . . . There's a lot of opinions, like "I don't know for sure. Actually, the Soviet [Union] was so nice."(interview 13)

However, other activists remained open-minded about allies, given the complicated and fluid political situation. A feminist activist stated, "We have this principle: we cooperate with everyone, except for the fascists. . . . Because this is the only strategy that seems productive to us. And we don't want to become isolated. . . . The entire opposition agenda is so far from the ordinary nonpoliticized Russian that there is no difference between us. If we now endlessly

explain where we disagree, it will be pointless. Therefore, if there is a specific goal, we collaborate with anyone except the fascists" (interview 4). Other interviewees also expressed a desire for more unified action among critics of the Putin regime who have left the country (interviews 6, 9, 15, 16).

The Political Context of the Digital Sphere

Long-distance activism (such as networked activism that includes people inside and outside Russia) is often digital—which has many advantages, as it enables cooperation and lowers risks. Ideally, it can circumvent some of the challenges of both the Russian and host country POS. Digital activism also provides the means to articulate a shared collective identity and cultivate common discourses in a space that is not geographically bounded. Telegram channels and online chats were the most frequently mentioned means of communication among activists, in addition to some coordinated campaigns (interviews 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14). But what are the challenges of connecting digital and nondigital activism? Activists in Russia are at risk if they undertake in person, public actions in a way that those abroad are not and may be at risk if they engage in digital activism in a way that is not anonymous. Digital activism may also be surveilled or subverted by governments or their sympathizers, demonstrating the porosity of that space. Nevertheless, to this point, Russian activists in exile have not faced significant online censorship akin to that of China.

Some activist organizations that our interviewees engaged with straddle the digital/nondigital divide. FAR, for instance, published a print-it-yourself newspaper called Women's Truth (*Zhenskaia pravda*), which people could distribute anonymously in physical spaces in Russia (or share on social media or by email). This tactic aimed to break through Russian state propaganda and help spread accurate information about the war beyond the "activism bubble." However, the labeling of FAR as an undesirable organization in April 2024 meant that any association with Women's Truth, such as distributing it or possibly even commenting online on its articles, could be dangerous. These transborder efforts by Russians abroad to connect with their domestic compatriots were not shielded from Russia's POS. Environmental activists organizing local clean-ups use Telegram channels for new arrivals and social media to recruit volunteers. Likewise, the Russian Socioecological Union, a network of environmental activists with members inside Russia and abroad, monitors pressure on environmentalists in Russia, publicizing their plight to a broader audience. Several environmentalists also created the Ecological Crisis Group to provide legal support to activists who remain under pressure in Russia and offer practical advice on their Telegram channel for activists under threat.

Funding Activists in Exile

The POS for activists in Russia, starting in the early post-Soviet period, included well-resourced allies that provided grants and other financial support to civil society, including both environmentalists and feminists. These opportunities dwindled over time but did not disappear. Since 2012, however, the Russian government has used carrots and sticks to shape resource flows for Russian activists to encourage certain forms of mobilization and discourage others. The "sticks" include the various iterations of Russia's foreign agent laws and the law on "undesirable" organizations, while presidential grants and other state funding for socially oriented NGOs constitute the "carrots" (Bogdanova, Cook, and Kulmala 2018).

The relationships between foreign donors and activist recipients in Russia have been profoundly disrupted since the initial foreign agent laws were implemented. Because several of the major foundations that had funded Russian civil society in the 1990s turned their attention elsewhere once the twenty-first century began, many activists grew accustomed to working without significant foreign financing, giving up the idea of having dedicated office space, and relying on volunteer labor rather than grant-funded positions. Although some activist groups

continued to have ties to international donor-partners, by the time Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine began in 2022, the trend away from "NGO-ization" in Russia was in full swing.

Activism, however, still requires resources. Ironically, some activists accused of being "foreign agents" while in Russia now may indeed find themselves based in countries viewed with suspicion by the Russian government. But, since they are no longer in Russia, the fear of the pejorative label "foreign agent" is no longer as relevant—either for activists or for donors who otherwise might have worried that financially supporting Russian activists inside Russia could put them at risk.

The outflow of activists is now creating a new opportunity to build connections between foreign donors and Russian recipients. The overall goal of support to activists in exile remains a bit unclear. The representative of a Berlin-based NGO providing relocation assistance to some activists stated,

> I think that when we are intently providing support for those real pillars of human rights activism in the country, we are providing them with a safe space, and ability for them to continue their work however they can, and also just to get on their feet and stay sane or come back to sanity, as the case is with many. So, it's triage, but it's triage for a particular community that we really believe in and that I really believe needs to be ready when the time comes to go back because they all want to go back. And they all want to go back and . . . have a real part in the rebuilding of their country. . . . They're the necessary component for a healthy democratic society (interview 19).

An environmental activist in Georgia agreed: "It seems to me that it is really important . . . simply to preserve at least something, to preserve civil society at least in some form, so that when all this ends if all this happens in our lifetime, . . . so that there is something from which to grow a new civil society in a new field" (interview 10). These quotes evoke the idea of "abeyance structures" from social movement theory in which "'abeyance' depicts a holding process by which movements sustain themselves in nonreceptive political environments and provide continuity from one stage of mobilization to another" (Taylor 1989). They also illustrate how Russia's repressive political sphere—and donors' anticipation that it may become less so—shapes the funding opportunities even for activists no longer living there.

However, only a small fraction of those who left the country have received support from international or non-Russian NGOs—and most have relied on connections with donors they had cultivated in the past. Those who relocated to Berlin tended to be relatively well-resourced activists who were already better connected with Western partners and donors than those who landed in Tbilisi. The scarcity of resources naturally shapes the sustainability of activism. A feminist and disability rights activist stated, "You constantly feel ashamed that you're kind of burning out. . . . Well, these are the times when there's no time for burnout" (interview 23). Ironically, if this trend of supporting pre-existing partners grows, foreign foundation and/or governmental funding for Russian activists in exile could inadvertently recreate some of the same challenges for Russian civil society (e.g., competition for scarce resources preventing possible collaboration) that Russian activists faced at home in the 1990s (Sundstrom 2006; Henderson 2003; Sperling 1999). The semiporous nature of state borders that has enabled the self-exiling of Russian activists has simultaneously recreated a more fluid—and complicated—transborder opportunity structure for social movement funding.

CONCLUSION

How can we characterize the activism in exile organized by those who have left Russia? For disrupted feminist and environmental social movement networks, this is certainly not a mobilization period, but demobilization is not a helpful lens. Instead, we see a period of diversifying and experimental activism driven by high levels of uncertainty about the current context and the future. While activists have grown more physically distant from their colleagues in Russia,

they have made enormous efforts to maintain networks and solidarity, often through online discussions and events. Activists rarely target the Russian government directly but still work to shape the opinions of the Russian public and international communities about Russia. Some activists pursue local projects—at times collaboratively—in their new host country, potentially contributing to a change in activist discourses or practices there. Above all, they have their eye on the future of the Russian political system.

Given the fluidity and uncertainty of the current moment, is the political process model—and specifically the POS—a useful approach to understanding activism? We find the concept of a porous POS useful in highlighting important dilemmas and questions. First, activists are traversing multiple, and often intersecting, sets of political opportunities—with part of their focus continuing to be on Russia, while other parts of their attention are directed toward new digital ventures, organizing efforts in their home countries, and, occasionally, more internationally focused activism. Activists face key challenges in all of these spheres. As time passes since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, many activists themselves acknowledge an increasing unfamiliarity with the day-to-day situation on the ground in Russia and express concern about distance from their colleagues in Russia. Some interviewees worry about transnational pressure or repression and the porous POS border that enables such pressure to affect even activists who live abroad. Those who focus on digital activism express their desire to amplify their message online but also worry about building trust among remote communities and creating echo chambers of those who are already like-minded. Further, activists' current location in a host country often rests on a temporary legal status—a time-limited visa—that could expire without renewal as host countries respond to developments in Russia and the war. Seeing this POS as porous—requiring activists living abroad to juggle the constraints and opportunities generated by being subject to multiple political environments where their identity as Russians conditions their alliances, their resource opportunities, and their likelihood of encountering repression—increases the utility of the POS concept for describing activism in a more globalized and less democratic context.

Second, the experience of emigration and the "movement of movements" raises a number of important questions about the audiences and perceived authenticity of activism. Is it possible to characterize which activism now is "Russian" and what is "international"? For movements with activists in Russia and abroad, how does the movement explain itself and its goals to multiple audiences? Generally, the audience for social movement activism is both domestic and international. As movement actors disperse beyond Russia, activists must rebuild networks and create new coalitions. It may be harder to build social capital when some movement participants are in Russia and others are not. Activists who have remained are under intense pressure. Although people who have left may be physically safer, they are often in precarious financial and professional positions. Can such grounds for potential rifts between the "escapers" and "remainers" be overcome by building new transnational networks?

Third, the fluidity and uncertainty of the relevant political context makes it challenging for activists to devise strategies. It also presents challenges for existing theories of effective transnational advocacy, as described above. In the typical TAN model, activists in a repressive context can call upon allies in other, more democratic contexts to pressure their governments to, in turn, press the target state to cease its human rights violations or other violent behavior. Keck and Sikkink referred to this as the "boomerang" model and noted that such international advocacy was most effective when there was also a strong movement within the target country. In the Russian case, however, the degree of repression is such that domestic activist movements (especially those that overtly oppose regime policy or that are regarded as ideological threats by the regime) are not strong—and the allies outside of Russia who are trying to amplify Russian activists' messages may themselves be Russian exiles.

Finally, hypothetically, participating in activism (whether abroad, at home, or mixed) could help build "social capital"—a crucial element of civil society and democracy in the long run. State repression like that imposed by Russia over the past decade makes it more challenging to support

activists from abroad—hence, the "adapting" activists inside Russia had essentially stopped looking for foreign funding well before the invasion. "Escaping" activists, however, could perhaps be more easily funded, as international supporters who endorse the goals of these activists no longer need worry as much about activists being harmed by "foreign agent" labels or "undesirable organization" laws. Is it possible to seize this opportunity to build transnational connections and keep Russian civil society's pro-democracy, human rights, and anticolonial sectors active?

Further research on the themes of migrant activists' continued mobility in their search for greater opportunities, their strategies designed to bridge geographically distant members of an activist network (particularly in the digital sphere), and changes to the PPOS due to innovations in transnational repression will help us answer these questions. Meanwhile, on the ground, the future of these movements will depend in part on the creativity and commitment of Russian activists, at home and abroad, and their international partners as they navigate the many challenges of acting within a complex and porous political opportunity structure.

NOTES

[1] The digital opportunity structure played an important role in feminist activism in Russia well before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and even before the war began in 2014 (Kovyliaeva 2022).
[2] Quotations from interviews conducted in Russian presented in this paper were translated into English by the authors.
[3] Фемки» – как феминистские движения превратились в инструменты гибридной войны Запада против России. Telegram: https://ona.org.ru/post/721762772796522497/femki.

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