

**Global Feminisms
Comparative Case Studies of
Women's Activism and Scholarship
RUSSIA**

Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova

Interviewed by Natal'ia Pushkareva

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Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova, also referred to as “Elena Rostislavovna” throughout this interview, was born in 1963, holds a Masters in Social Work and is a Doctor of Sociology. She is a Professor in the Department of Sociology at the National Research University Higher School of Economics in Moscow, Russia. She is also Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Social Policy Studies and Leading Research Fellow at the Institute of Social Policy at the same university. She was previously Chair of the Department of Sociology, Social Anthropology, and Social Work at Saratov State Technical University and advisor and co-founder of the non-governmental research organization Center for Social Policy and Gender Studies. Her research interests include social policy, sociology of professions, gender and disability, family and children, as well as visual and qualitative research methods. She teaches courses on the sociology of the public sphere, visual anthropology, qualitative research methods, social policy, gender studies, and social work. Her main publications in Russian include: *Socio Cultural Analysis of Otherness* (Saratov 1997), *Social Citizenship of People with Disabilities in Russia* (co-authored with Pavel Romanov, Saratov 2005), and in English: *Gender and Class in Russian Welfare Policy: Soviet Legacies and Contemporary Challenges* (Goteborg University 2011), *Disability in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: History, policy and everyday life* (co-edited with Michael Rasell, Routledge 2014). She has also published journal articles and book chapters, including: “Raising Disabled Children in Russia: Institutions, discussions, and personalities” (2015); “Social Work in Post-Soviet Countries” (2013); “The Influence of Social Workers on Russian Social Policy” (2013); “The Active Class in Discussions of Social Welfare: ‘Unfortunate families’ in Russia” (2012); “Single Mothers – Clients or Citizens? Social Work with Low-Income Families in Russia” (2012); “A Girl who Loved to Dance: The Life Experiences of Russian Women with Low-Functioning Motor Apparatuses” (2011); “Visual Sources of in the Teaching of History and Issues of Gender in Social Work” (2009); “An Inventory of Gender Aspects in Social Work in Russia: On the Path Towards an Anti-discrimination Practice” (2008); “The Gender Aspect in Russian Textbooks on Social Policy and Social Work” (2007); “‘Our Pay Doesn’t Mean a Lot’: The Professionalization of Social Work in Contemporary Russian” (2002); “‘I Don’t Know What the Future Holds...’: Mothering Disabled Children in Russian and the Politics of Rejection” (1999).

Natal’ia L’vovna Pushkareva was born on September 23rd, 1959 in Moscow, Russia. She is currently a Professor, Chief Research Fellow, and the Head of the Womens and Gender Studies Department at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology at the Russian Academy of Sciences. Her fields of interest include gender history, history of family relations, the social anthropology of the academic community, as well as the history of sexuality in medieval, modern, and contemporary Russia. The chief editor of the yearbook *Sotsial’naia istoriia (Social History)*, she also serves as president of the Russian Association for Research in Women’s History. From 1981 to 2016, she has edited more than thirty essay collections, published dozens of articles for both academic and non-academic magazines, and written dictionary and encyclopedia entries as well as monographs. Pushkareva is considered to be a principal founder of the field of women’s studies in Russia.

The Global Feminisms Project is a collaborative international oral history project that examines feminist activism, women's movements, and academic women's studies in sites around the world. Housed at the University of Michigan, the project was started in

2002 with a grant from the Rackham Graduate School. The virtual archive includes interviews from women activists and scholars from Brazil, China, India, Nicaragua, Poland, and the United States.

Our collaborator in Russia is Dr. Natalia L. Pushkareva, who gathered a diverse group of feminist scholar-activists and colleagues for the Russia portion of the Global Feminisms Project and conducted the majority of the interviews. Our work in Russia was supported by a Collaborative Planning Grant from University of Michigan's Institute for Research on Women and Gender.

Key Words: music, academia, teaching, funding, anthropology, sociology

Natal'ia Pushkareva: Elena Rostislavovna Iarskaia-Smirnova, Doctor of Sociology, Ph.D., full professor at the Higher School of Economics at the Department of Sociology at the Faculty of Social Sciences; editor-in-chief of the Journal of Social Policy Studies, lead research fellow at the Institute for Social Policy. Good afternoon, Elena Rostislavovna. Please tell us about your life, how you see your own life, where you are right now; how you view the path that you have already traveled, and how you view your profession, your professional development; that is, how does your career look in terms of all your efforts and results to date. In other words, is there still much to be achieved and what are your goals? Tell me briefly about yourself.

Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova: Well, I'm... I'm not sure where to start. I am now at that stage where you look over your life and search it for some new meanings, but at the same time, you continue what you've been doing. Maybe I'll speak a little bit a higher level, I'm not sure. I can say that I am now looking more for new subjects and new discoveries. I do what research I can, and I find myself, I think I can say, at a new beginning now.

NP: Where did you start on your professional path?

EIS: My professional path. Natal'ia, forgive me, will you edit this?

NP: Yes, of course.

EIS: Well, as I was saying, it's hard for me to talk about new prospects and the future. My professional path started, I believe, at the university. I graduated from the State University, from the Department of Mechanics and Mathematics.

NP: In Moscow.

EIS: No, in Saratov. Saratov State University in 1984. So... I was interested in folklore while I was a student there. I was involved with folklore, and I even organized my own folk music group. I always wanted to avoid the beaten path, so I made my own. Although

I graduated with honors, I didn't reach great heights in mathematics. I think my education at the mathematical school was helpful here. ¹

So I breezed through the first few courses at the university, wasting my time. Most mathematical school graduates would agree with me that they were easy. Then after graduation, I became a mathematician and for some time worked at a computing center of one of Saratov's research institutes. But I was not at all interested in that profession then. I didn't see the point because I was so into folklore. And not just folklore, but cultural anthropology, folklore studies, and ethnography. I went on expeditions where I met colleagues from Moscow, professionals in the field. Including Vera Medvedeva (now Nikitina), a very well-known ethno-musicologist. She published numerous records even then; now she releases her collections on CDs. She has a great knowledge of folklore and personally knows and corresponds with numerous folk music performers. We were friends and went on expeditions, and then in Saratov, I started this trend towards ethnographic examinations of folk music groups. Many of my collaborators later created their own music groups, and I was more interested in that, I wrote articles for newspapers, trying to publicize folklore and folk music.

NP: This is the end of the 1980s.

EIS: It was more likely the mid '80s, and after university, we continued doing this. I was in graduate school.

In graduate school I went on to study philosophy; my mother is a philosopher. And she inspired me. My mother likes to share a funny story she remembers from my childhood: I was still very young, I only learned to distinguish the letters of the alphabet, and I was playing around with many books and journals that were all over the place in our apartment – my mother was writing her doctoral thesis at the time. And I asked, looking at a journal, "Hmm, *Questions of Philosophy*. And where are the answers?"

I probably went to graduate school in search of one of those answers. But here again it did not turn out to be what my thesis advisor wanted. It was Sergei Fedorovich Martynovich who gave me the most interesting topic as I now see it: "The Concept of Scientific Fact." It's a brilliant topic, and I would love to take it up now. But at that time, it did not interest me at all, and I had no idea what it could mean and why it might be important. And because of, on the one hand, my unconscious resistance, and on the other hand, my deep interest in folklore, I wrote my thesis on "The Philosophical Analysis of Folk Culture" instead of "The Philosophical Analysis of Scientific Fact." Sergei Fedorovich was my thesis advisor anyway and he helped me tremendously and advised me. But it was mostly my mother who helped me on this topic because she was a specialist on... She advised many graduate students then and was a well-known philosopher at that time. And with this thesis on folklore and degree in mathematics, I found myself at the Sociological Center of the Polytechnic Institute. A third...

NP: In Saratov?

¹ An American equivalent of such school would be magnet school, which is a school with specialized courses and curriculum. In this case it would be mathematics.

EIS: Yes, in Saratov. A third interest I had was Not folklore, not philosophy, not mathematics – so actually a fourth one. It was good that it was already the late eighties; in 1989 I defended my Candidate's Dissertation in Philosophy, and I think in 1990 or in 1991 there was this Higher Komsomol School (renamed later as the Institute of Youth). Natalushko was there (unfortunately, I don't remember her first name). So together with luminaries in sociology, social philosophy, and with her foreign colleagues, some English scholars, she organized these Higher Sociological Courses. They lasted six or nine months. I remember it was 1990 or 1991, and I attended these courses either at the first or the second run.

These luminaries were our lecturers: Iadov...² Sorry about that. I'll turn off my phone.

After the break.

NP: So the first or second set.

EIS: Yes, at these Higher Sociological Courses. It was definitely a turning point for me. I fell in love with sociology, just like with folklore, because of these courses and because I got to meet with the masters of Soviet and early Russian sociology, and with enthusiasts who were studying there with me. They were almost the same age and also retraining from other professions in which they had already worked. Many had practiced in sociology.

Actually, I worked at the Sociological Center. At that time, they had all-Soviet and then all-Russian programs of public opinion studies. There was the program "People of Russia," through which we studied the issue of Germans in the Volga region³ – we had many interesting topics. We used mostly quantitative methods. At that time, social work became something you could major in. My mother, Valentina Nikolayevna Jarskaya, played a big role here. She was part of a working group at the Ministry of Labor. I think it was then called the Ministry of Social Welfare – something like that. I don't quite remember right now. They, together with the Swedes, developed the first curriculum and agreed to teach social work at four Russian universities.

And gradually I began to teach there too because I already knew some sociology and had some understanding of cultural anthropology and philosophy. I was teaching cultural studies there. Then I taught some of the sociological disciplines and, on top of everything else, I went to study in Sweden. They had an international program, which was financed by...

NP: In which years was this?

EIS: This was in 1992. The program was financed by... my studies were financed by the Swedish Institute. Four people who were involved in teaching social work in Russia were selected. And there was this hope that the students of the program would return home after their year in Sweden to enlighten the masses. I should say that after I graduated

² The original transcript adds the names Fetisov, Zaslavskaja, and Levada.

³ The Volga region is one of the eight federal districts of Russia, encompassing territories next to the flow of the Volga River. Volga Germans are ethnic Germans who colonized and lived along the Volga River. (Koch, *The Volga Germans: in Russia and the Americas, from 1763 to the present*, Penn State Press, 2010).

from the university in 1984 I enrolled in graduate school in 1985. No, I think I went right away in 1984. In 1985 my son Slava was born, and that's why my graduate school lasted a bit longer.

As my son grew up, he also studied folklore, from birth actually, because we constantly rehearsed at home. Even the neighbors came in, asking what was going on in our home with your banging, your songs, and sounds. Now we remember. It's pretty funny actually. We had all these costumes, went on the expeditions, and studied all of the folk costumes which we bought in the villages. Many of us had children, and we were out in the streets, singing. Slava is still actively involved with folklore, he is also an anthropologist. I had to, unfortunately, leave him for a year with his grandparents. He lived with them and then he... **[Knock at the door]** Yes? Who's there?

After the break.

Slava was—he was born in 1985— so he was seven and already going to school, and he came with his grandparents to see me in Sweden a few times. That was great..

So a new world opened up to me, this world of Western education in the humanities and social sciences, of qualitative methods. Because the Swedes in Gothenburg used phenomenology and qualitative methods. Their professional social work studies are theoretical, both top-down and bottom-up. They talked about the social construction of reality; they had people who studied under Garfinkel.⁴ So it was this world that was earlier available to me only through reading translations.

There I read everything in the original language. I studied English. In the past I had only studied German, but I had to switch to English and I was able to thanks to intensive language courses. It was this kind of movement in the early nineties. Everyone went through intensive language courses. English, French, and German. And because of them I got some sense of English, but in Sweden I was able to completely dive in and learn Swedish and English. When I was there, I really got into the study of the family. And later, a year later, I also had an internship there, through which I became interested in disability issues.

So my entry into gender research was through social policy, social work, social problems, disability, and family. And family policy. In a comparative aspect. My Swedish master's thesis turned out to be about comparing Swedish and Russian family policies. I proceeded from...

NP: In which years was this?

EIS: This was in 1992, 1993.

NP: And those years encompassed all...

⁴ Harold Garfinkel (1917-2011) was an American sociologist and social theorist known for his development of ethnomethodology (the study of methods people use for understanding the social order in which they live) within sociology. He was most recently a professor emeritus at University of California, Los Angeles. (Harold Garfinkel Obituary, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2011/jul/13/harold-garfinkel-obituary>, accessed August 2017).

EIS: Those were the most important years, I mean, the most important...

NP: The 90s?

EIS: Yes, the 90s, the beginning of the 90s. My thesis was about those times, the nineties, the beginning of the nineties. My work here was, of course, only at the level of the master's thesis. It was a not substantial. However, there was a survey: I was allowed to use the survey data from the Saratov Sociological Center, then in Sweden; I conducted a survey of families, parents of disabled children, and studied disability policy. Then I conducted a study using a similar methodology in Russia; I did a comparative analysis. This is already for my doctoral thesis that I defended in 1997. But before that when I had just returned from Sweden, I came back to my students. We had a great time. I told them about what I learned in Sweden, and they were listening, mouths agape. I have to say that it wasn't just me alone. We had many interesting teachers. Everyone had a unique specialty before they came into the field of social work because social work hadn't existed in Russia. We had a psychologist, a doctor, a psychiatrist, a philosopher, even social biologists – it was a very interesting group.

NP: Were these social biologists who were also interested in the concept of gender?

EIS: No, I mean the Department of Social Work at the university. The social work program. Initially we knew little about gender because it was 1990-something—hold on—1991, and we had just started the program. Then I went to Sweden. I returned in 1993, and I taught phenomenology, qualitative methods, and social work as it's known in Sweden. And around 1994, probably, if I'm not mistaken, or in 95, Sergei Kukhtherin—it was 94— at the Institute of Sociology set up continuing education courses for sociology lecturers.

And the first courses I taught in that institute were in gender studies. And Irina Tartakovskaia and Irina Aristarkhova taught them.

So they were my guides into the world of gender, into gender studies. Every time I switched locales, it felt like diving into an ocean from a waterfall, just falling down and entering a completely different world. Though this time it was not a completely different thing, it was not a sudden change. On the contrary, this change went smoothly and fit nicely with what I already knew – folklore, cultural anthropology and philosophy. My passive knowledge of mathematics served me. I ended up using it, when I was working at the sociological center because I had to make surveys and work with the data. Sorry, I'm getting ahead of myself.

But all the same it turned out that gender studies found in my mind a solid foundation in these qualitative methods in social work, sociology, cultural anthropology, and folklore. And I even had a homework assignment for Irina Tartakovskaia's course. She always gave homework assignments, and I remember writing something about women's headdresses in the Russian folk tradition, yes. I always looked for ways to use what I knew already. And I had course on cultural sociology and the sociology of culture in Sweden and I wrote a paper – I had topics like Pieter Bruegel.⁵ So I was always interested in things having to do with culture. I always looked for examples in the history of culture, in art history, to

⁵ Pieter Bruegel the Elder was a sixteenth-century Dutch painter known for his landscapes and peasant scenes.

illustrate theories, even contemporary ones. Like when you explain, for example, social relations, cultural facts, etc... structures. So yes, thanks to these courses at the Institute of Sociology I had this gender socialization, or more specifically, a coming to consciousness of gender.

NP: What attracted you most in these courses? Why did they interest and inspire you?

EIS: I'm not sure. I had this... You know, I've always... All my antennas were up then and I knew that I was at the right place. Possibly, that's exactly where I was supposed to be because I was already interested in questions of the family and gender. I didn't spend that year in Sweden at Gothenburg in vain. That was where I started hearing about the family as a subject of study, about women's studies and gender studies. And so I...

NP: And you hear about feminism then too?

EIS: No, not exactly. Because we had a master's program at Gothenburg in Social Work, which was adapted to a one-year program. And it was, of course, filled with qualitative methods and phenomenology. Their course names were, for instance, "Culture, Family, and Society." That is, they didn't have any course simply by discipline, like "Sociology" or "Family sociology." Their courses were all-embracing and interdisciplinary. They were really taught interdisciplinarily. Later, in Saratov, I tried to adapt our curriculum and we had these kinds of courses—maybe, they weren't always successful—but we tried to title our conferences and summer schools something like "Family, Gender and Culture." Something like that. So...

NP: How did the word "gender" appear in your work and studies at the time? How did "gender studies" appear in disability studies or in gender sociology or in your personal work?

EIS: First off, I think Irina Tartakovskaia's course was called "Sociology of the Family and Sex" or "Sociology of the Family and Gender," I don't remember exactly. But naturally she taught... They... The thing is, they had an internship in Manchester with Simon Clark just to read up on literature for courses. The first time there... In those initial years when they lectured, they worked with these word-for-word first drafts of translations.⁶ However, even in their unadapted versions, when you just heard it in anglicized Russian (because, again, good Russian translations weren't available then) – you got the gist of it. I and, I hope, all the others who were with me then—I don't remember who studied with me, we didn't keep in touch—I remember that we were all shaken and astounded by these lectures. Because this knowledge felt so right, necessary, and obvious, and at the same time deep and complex. Perhaps we lacked knowledge, theories, and books. I remember that all my trips were to Moscow. There is a Soviet joke: What is green, long, and smells

⁶ EIS uses the term *podstrochnik* to refer to these translations. In the Soviet Union from the 1930s on, translations were produced by teams of workers. An initial translator, fluent in the source language, would render two draft versions of the text, two *podstrochniks*, into the target language. One would be a word-for-word translation with a commentary explaining the relevant features of the text, i.e. word play, rhythm, rhyme, while the other would be a translation of the meaning of the text. A translator fluent in the target language, usually an established writer, would then from these two *podstrochniks*, produce a final version of the text in acceptable prose of the target language.

like sausage? It's the Moscow-Saratov train. Because they brought sausage from Moscow to Saratov. Well, my train, Moscow-Saratov, didn't smell like sausage. But it was very heavy because I was hauling books in my backpack and in my arms. In my bags. Because only here, in Moscow could you buy books by Weber,⁷ Sorokin,⁸ and Durkheim.⁹ They began to publish and republish Russian translations again. And there were new translations too. Books by Malinowski,¹⁰ by Schutz.¹¹ We bought them all, and then books on gender became available. Books by Kon,¹²

NP: Which were the first? Which ones? Was it mostly translations of Western texts? What did it start with?

EIS: No, Western translations came later. At first it was what both Irinas (Tartakovskaia and Aristarkhova) translated and gave us as printouts. And that was all...

NP: When was that? In the 90s?

EIS: That was in 1996. None of those books had been translated yet. And even now, I don't know whether much of what they handed out then has been translated and published into Russian. However, they were such perfect selections that for a very long time I used them in my lectures for students.

NP: And did you sense that this knowledge derived from the books of feminist theorists or gender anthropologists and others – did it somehow influence your professional choices, the topics you chose to study, the topics you gave to your graduate students to develop?

EIS: Yes, of course. Firstly, one of my first graduate students defended her thesis on gender. The very first such graduate student, though, was Nadezhda Shapkina, who defended on the topic of disability studies. But later Tat'iana Grechenkova and—hang on—Marina Ishchenko and, I think, Svetlana Usmanova wrote their dissertations on gender. I'm forgetting one young woman who did her thesis on women's crisis centers.

⁷ Max Weber (1864-1920) was a German sociologist and political economist who is often cited as one of the three founders of Sociology as an academic discipline. He is best known for his work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904), arguing against Marx's historical materialism. (Max Weber, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/weber/>, accessed August 2017).

⁸ Pitirim Sorokin (1889-1968) was a Russian American sociologist who founded the Department of Sociology at Harvard University. (Pitirim Aleksandrovich Sorokin, <http://www.asanet.org/about-asa/asa-story/asa-history/past-asa-officers/past-asa-presidents/pitirim-aleksandrovich-sorokin>, accessed August 2017).

⁹ Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) was a French sociologist who is often cited as one of the three founders of Sociology as an academic discipline, working to establish its scientific legitimacy. He is best known for this work *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893) and *Suicide* (1897). (Emile Durkheim, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/durkheim/>, accessed August 2017).

¹⁰ Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) was a Polish anthropologist, remembered as one of the most influential anthropologists of the 20th-century for founding social anthropology. (Bronislaw Malinowski, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bronislaw-Malinowski>, accessed August 2017).

¹¹ Alfred Schutz (1899-1959) was an Austrian philosopher and social phenomenologist, often recognized as one of the twentieth century's leading philosophers in social science. (Alfred Schutz, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/schutz/>, accessed August 2017).

¹² Igor Kon (1928-2011) was a Soviet and Russian philosopher, psychologist, and sexologist. He was one of the first Soviet scholars to publish textbooks on sociology. (Igor Kon, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Igor_Kon, accessed August 2017).

She worked in one of them. And another interesting thing: we had the Social Work Department, which meant that all students did internships, and most of them were young women.

NP: When you say “we had,” you mean in Saratov, right?

EIS: Yes, in Saratov. So they were all interested in the subjects of gender, family, children, inequality, and discrimination. And, of course, because I was interested not only in this, but also in disability studies and social policy, all of us tried to integrate it. That's why we had topics like “Gender Aspects of Disability.” I remember that Elena Kochkina worked in the Women's Program at the Soros Fund, the Open Society Institute, and she created an inter-regional project “One Hundred Women's Stories,” something like that.¹³ And my colleagues and I have been collecting stories from women with disabilities. And then we wrote an article and participated in the book project. The Moscow Center for Gender Studies, MCGS, also invited us to participate in research projects. But, for the most part, we did our own research. We, of course, had the MacArthur Foundation,¹⁴ which supported us tremendously in our research on gender issues in social policy. We always studied social policy at the micro and macro level. And we always included gender in the analyses. And we always had ethnography and qualitative methods. Because all of this, of course – I have to say that in 1996, alongside courses on gender – and I was always, I mean, I always loved to study everything at once, and I signed up for two courses. At that time Sergei Kukhterin gave us the chance to take up multiple lines of inquiry.

And at that time there was a course on the sociology of management, which was taught by the Pavel Romanov.¹⁵ Since we met, we haven't been apart. Well, obviously we were away from each other because for a while we lived in different cities. But I remember our first photocopies at the Xerox machine. That's one of my memories of him. At that time we were always copying materials. It was our way of life: we attended these jaw-dropping lectures, took notes, and then copied all of them and the other stuff we read. And so I remember I was there, at the Xerox machine, holding a cup of tea when Pavel took a picture of me. He took pictures of everyone at that time. But this photo he took of me became the starting point of our relationship. He always told me, “I remember that photo of you at the Xerox.” And later we both went to England for an internship. Our friendship strengthened, and we became closer. We met with British colleagues, with Simon Clark, and I became a part of the faculty where Pavel worked. That faculty included not only teachers of continuing education courses, but also researchers. What was really valuable about it is that all of them—Irina Tartakovskaia, Pavel, and Irina Aristarkhova—they

¹³ George Soros, founder of the Open Society Foundations, is one of the world's most notable philanthropists and investors. His organization supports individuals and groups fighting against discrimination and inequality, including many women's rights issues. (“George Soros.” Open Society Foundations. Accessed February 14, 2018. “<https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/people/george-soros>”<https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/people/george-soros>.)

¹⁴ See <https://www.macfound.org/> for more information.

¹⁵ Pavel Romanov (1964-2014) was a Russian sociologist, professor, editor-in-chief of the Journal of Social Policy Issues, and the director of the Center for Social Policy and Gender Studies. See his website (in Russian: <http://www.pavel-romanov.com/>, accessed August 2017) and professional profile (<https://www.hse.ru/en/staff/romanov>, accessed August 2017).

were not just lecturers. They were, first and foremost, sociologists and researchers. So everything that they learned from foreign books (and they were erudite and familiar with Russian literature too) they could later use and apply in their research. The examples they showed us were not only about England, but also about Russia, of course.

NP: And these qualitative methods – who taught them? And I mean teaching in the sense that who taught you while working – in your ethnographic work, through the observations you included, the recordings of interjections in conversations, and feminist and women’s approaches to the recording of interviews, which is a bit different than what you get in sociology textbooks. Where did feminist approaches to interviewing and interview descriptions come from? Who explained that for the first time and who led to it?

EIS: First of all, I had experience with ethnographic expeditions. And we took notes on everything. Of course, then we were most interested in songs. Musical folklore in songs. We were also interested in rituals and everyday life, but less so than in music. Only later did I realize how much I lost when I went on expeditions only in search of music and in search of understanding of traditions, which now only come out of the family trunk, so to speak, at celebrations and concerts. Of course, folklore lives on and develops. But at that time we were mistakenly interested only in the family trunk, what so-called “authentic”¹⁶ culture was like, what dresses were like. Nevertheless, this experience of recording it first on a reel-to-reel recorder, on those reels – remember those? I still remember how our masters of the folklore movement, renowned musicologists (Andrei Kabanov¹⁷, for instance), many of them were close and even took part in Dmitrii Pokrovskii's¹⁸ folk music group. Later these kind of gurus, so to speak, emerged from his group. Andrei Kabanov started the folklore movement and made it popular. And the young people became interested. But for many, Dmitrii Pokrovskii's group was a kind of self-discovery, a discovery of this music, an opening of some kind of new opportunity. And there, for instance, we studied multi-channel recording (when many microphones were used for many tracks and you could listen to each vocalist separately). Of course, then we paid attention to interjections, to all kinds of dialects. We called it “song decoding”. We had to decode it. However, we were decoding the lyrics, not the music because they were sung in the most incredible way. We traveled all over, north and south. To Belgorod¹⁹ and to

¹⁶ Language Review Note: “So-called ‘authentic’” was added to the translation for purposes of clarity.

¹⁷ Andrei Kabanov was one of the founders of the folk revival movement in Russia. (Olson, Laura. *The Early Years of the Folk Revival Movement in Contemporary Russian Culture (1960S-1980S)*. University of Colorado. https://www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceer/2000_814-09g_Olson.pdf.)

¹⁸ Dmitri Pokrovsky (1944-1996) was a Russian folk music researcher and musician who attempted to preserve folklore traditions by playing music with the Dmitri Pokrovsky Ensemble (which consisted of him, his wife, and other musicians). He became the President of the UNESCO International Folklore Organization of Russia. For information on the group, see <http://www.pokrovsky-ensemble.ru/> (in Russian, accessed August 2017).

¹⁹ Belgorod is a city in Russia close to the Northern border of Ukraine. (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. "Belgorod." Encyclopædia Britannica. November 21, 2011. Accessed February 21, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Belgorod-Russia>.)

see Nekrasov Cossacks in the south.²⁰ We went to places where people spoke their own versions of the language, with different meanings. And, of course, we probably paid too little attention to their lives, unfortunately. But all the same we gained this experience and learned to attend to small details, nuances, context, contexts of the lives of these individuals—women, men, children, the elderly, the disabled, the abled—and it was this, well, that’s how we did it.

NP: Did it impact your own life?

EIS: As for my own life...

NP: Did you have an opportunity and a sense that you wanted to compare what people were telling you to your own life? It's something you don't find in the regular sociology textbooks, it's not always found in all feminist, what we might conditionally call, textbooks that are, so to speak, sensitive to gender theory. I'm going to talk about this topic of "my life" and "the personal is political."²¹ "My life" and "the lives of your respondents." So I'm interested here in how your acquaintance with feminist theory and women's studies—maybe these weren't the main topics of your research and only peripheral—impacted your personal life and career.

EIS: Of course, all my trips to take these courses – these were my education... I would like to say that with my colleagues in Saratov at the Department of Social Work we received several grants from the EU and went to Europe. And I also had an internship in America. So I was educated quite a bit in the West and all of it saturated my consciousness. My system of values was definitely shaped in my adulthood, I would say in my thirties, when I agreed with these values because I had such wonderful friends and examples for me. My teachers, my foreign colleagues, and here my circle of friends. Do you remember our gender school near Samara? When we met, each of us gave a lecture there? Although we were all still kind of apprentices, teachers, and students all at once, but we were all about the same age. And everything was very democratic. I remember that they came up with something and it was possible to attend with children. That is all of it was done in this feminist way. And we met Sergei Oushakine,²² and, of course, Igor' Semenovitch Kon participated. Well, if he wasn't there personally, he was always present, so to speak, in our minds because he was one of our pillars. And we went to Foros, to that school on gender, to Irina and Sergei Zherebkin, to teach and participate in the round tables. It all had an impact on my system of values. I don't know about life style. I can't just delineate my life and say, "if it wasn't for gender, my life would have been different." I have the usual life of an academic. I probably work a lot in academia and help many young people

²⁰ Nekrasov Cossacks descend from Don Cossacks who fled to southern Russia in the early 18th century. Despite a history of persecution, some migrated to the USSR in 1962 and have preserved their language and ethnic identity. (Chronicle of the Cossacks-Nekrasovites (in Russian), <http://tumilevich.ru/>, accessed August 2017).

²¹ "The personal is political" was a political argument used by members of the second-wave feminism in the late 1960s. The term was first popularized by Carol Hanisch in her 1969 essay of the same name.

²² Serguei Oushakine is a Russian anthropologist who currently teaches Slavic Languages and Anthropology at Princeton University. (Serguei Alex Oushakine, <https://slavic.princeton.edu/people/faculty/serguei-alex-oushakine>, accessed August 2017).

and graduate students. This is how "the personal is political" manifested for me. Because we at the Department of Social Work, together with Pavel, created the Center for Social Policy and Gender Studies. We created it back in 1996. It was this kind of virtual community because immediately after my courses with Elena... err, with both Irinas, I wrote a proposal to one of the foundations and they gave a grant to support the establishment of a center and network. And then I called it *Center for Research on Gender*, and they gave me the grant. I wrote to my colleagues in other cities, and we conducted events and published some things. And we started with this...²³

NP: How long did this organization exist?

EIS: In 2003 we made it a legal entity. At first, it was enough that we had our Center for Research on Gender. It was just a temporary creative team. We came to an understanding on how we envisioned ourselves, and we did many good, important, and interesting things. In 2003 Galina Rakhmanova helped us; she worked at the Ford Foundation at the time. So she said there was a way to support a journal, but not the center. We searched for support for the center. And our journal, yes, we were planning to create a journal in Saratov. We had the Inter-Regional Institute of Social Sciences (IISS), which was headed by Velikhan Mirzekhanov. And we, with Dmitrii Mikhel and Velikhan, were thinking that we could launch the *Journal of Social Policy Studies*. But the IISS had no money, it just didn't happen then, and we started looking for funds and spoke with Galina Rakhmanova. She told us to apply for a journal. Then we set up a legal entity, and instead of the Center for Research on Gender, we named it the Center for Social Policy and Gender Studies. In 2003, both the journal and the center became official. In our first year we funded the journal on our own, just from Pavel's salary, from projects. Later we received a grant from the Ford Foundation.

NP: What was the status of the organization at first? Was it a non-profit partnership?

EIS: At first it was called a non-profit organization. After a few years, it changed its legal form slightly and became an autonomous non-profit organization. And thanks to the Social Work Department, to the Center, we constantly brought theory to practice. We worked with ministries, journalists, social work practitioners... And we had a short course for journalists on gender and also on non-discriminatory writing. And with social workers we had classes on gender and family. So we could express our political position and views to students. I mean our *political position*—you know what I'm talking about—in relation to gender and social problems.²⁴ So that's my "the personal is political."

Should we pause here and check on the kids?

After the break.

²³ The original transcript adds the following: "And then Pavel and I became involved in social policy. As a result, our center changed its name to the Center for Social Policy and Gender Studies."

²⁴ EIS is referring to the fact that since the mid-2000s, Russian law enforcement interprets the expression of a "political position" by a Russian educational institution or non-profit broadly and frequently prosecutes for alleged violations of statute.

EIS: Getting back to the topic. So I was talking about this social policy. Because our department was a part of the university and the Center was a non-profit. But our work was very integrated. All the members of the department participated in our projects, and there were a lot of network partnerships, from Kazan', from Samara, and from St. Petersburg. We were constantly conducting summer schools, seminars, courses. We continued our collaboration with Sergei Kukhterin. He hosted out-of-town courses here. We have, of course, always touched on this issue of social policy, and our values were clearly implemented in education, first of all. As far as personal life is concerned, Pavel always said, "I am a feminist." When he heard some racist, anti-semitic comments, he always said, "I'm a Jew." That is, he always staunchly defended his belief in tolerance, and we were always tolerant in our families and in our department. This was our credo, we were a very liberal team.

NP: And this is all in Saratov?

EIS: All of this was in the nineties and in the early 2000s. Sometime beginning in 2003 Pavel and I felt like we were missing something in Saratov. We thought we didn't have enough of a younger generation growing to replace us, we needed more bright students. We had this idea that it will be better in Moscow. Viktoriia Shmidt then worked for Shanin. She headed the Department of Social Management and Social Work at the Moscow Higher School of Economics, and she asked us to teach there. The was just a "wow" moment for us because "Shaninka"²⁵ was a very prestigious place. Batygin was his academic adviser for his Candidate's thesis; Pavel defended his Candidate's in 1998 on ethnographic method. Pavel—I don't remember whether he studied there—I think he didn't study at "Shaninka", but he was there often, attending courses and lectures. I too had always dreamed of studying at "Shaninka", and then suddenly we're invited to teach there. We wouldn't be teaching sociology, but social work. But our courses were still sociological because we taught social policy, social management, and social projects. That's what we liked, not just classical sociology, not just theory, but something practical related to social policy. And we worked on rotation: one month here, next month there. In Saratov we created modular education system. This was all after Sweden, we introduced this system to our management after I returned from Sweden, despite the fact that it was very inconvenient for physical education and foreign language teachers and other departments. But, nevertheless, we had a modular system. We had courses that lasted 1.5 to 2 months, like a quarter in grade schools. We adapted to traveling, to teaching at "Shaninka"; and, of course, we continued to work on our gender research. We had our Center, and our colleagues. We collaborated with a women's crisis center in Saratov. We were always promoting the subject of gender at TEMPUS²⁶ and in the European Union's programs.

²⁵ The Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences headed by British professor Theodor Shanin ("The Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences (Shaninka)." YouTube. December 27, 2012. Accessed February 21, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9RZH5bsjg0>.)

²⁶ Trans-European Mobility Programme for University Studies ("What does Tempus stand for?" Tempus - Trans-European Mobility Scheme for University Studies (EU) | AcronymFinder. Accessed February 21,

NP: So this is an important topic: regarding the relationship with other women's or research organizations, the international ones. Relationships with international organizations. How good were they? To what extent did they support you, perhaps with ideas or were there some grants, collaborative projects?

EIS: We received grants only from those foundations that have offices in Russia.

NP: Like MacArthur.

EIS: MacArthur, Ford, Soros. Of course, we had a few grants from the Open Society Institute. Those grants specifically focused on gender. Those were for the summer school, we had another for research. We worked later with Elena Kochkina²⁷ on her project "Women's Stories" and, of course, for the EU program TEMPUS. There was a need to develop social work education. Gender studies was one of our Center courses, despite the fact that this course didn't appear immediately in the State Committee for Standards and Product Quality Management list.²⁸ By the way, the social work program is one of the few programs which contains this course, although it's called "Genderology," but it's there. Unfortunately, that's the name they give it. We don't always, unfortunately, have good textbooks; there are very poor ones that are printed in large numbers. We reviewed such publications and made our own teaching aids. On another note, there was another project, I think, with the support of the Open Society Institute. If I'm not mistaken, Khasbulatova headed it, and she promoted several textbooks that were published by ROSSPEN²⁹. Gender sociology, gender political science, and a gender history were covered there. And we had "Social Policy and Social Work: Gender Issues." Even the colleagues from the "Anna" Crisis Center, the Moscow one, the very first one and the most famous, were included in our team. That included Sinel'nikov. They wrote a section on violence against women. We had largely a Saratov team, but there were also several colleagues from Moscow. This educational aid was, I think, very timely. Unfortunately, it wasn't published again because the grants were a one-time offer, so to speak.

NP: What was the attitude to the women's movement if there was an attitude at all at the time? Because it was in the early 1990s that we first had an independent women's movement. Because there were two Congresses in Dubna which brought together those organizations that had been created in the temporarily empty environment what with the inaction of the Soviet Women's Committee, which at that time ceased to exist. So did this women's movement cross paths with you in Saratov or no? Did you establish any relationships with any women's organizations other than those anti-violence centers? Those are the most prominent now, the

2018. [https://www.acronymfinder.com/Trans_European-Mobility-Scheme-for-University-Studies-\(EU\)-\(Tempus\).html](https://www.acronymfinder.com/Trans_European-Mobility-Scheme-for-University-Studies-(EU)-(Tempus).html).)

²⁷ See Global Feminisms Project interview with Yelena Kochkina on Russian site.

²⁸ State Committee for Standards and Product Quality Management ("State Committee for Standards and Product Quality Management." Wikipedia. February 14, 2018. Accessed February 21, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_Committee_for_Standards_and_Product_Quality_Management)

²⁹ Russian Political Encyclopedia Press ("The Tatar Book House." ReadRussia. Accessed February 21, 2018. <http://readrussia.org/publishers/P40>.)

crisis centers I mean. While research centers... Well, in this case I'm interested in how your research center and maybe women's organizations in Saratov, maybe in Moscow –did you have relationships with them or no?

EIS: For me the women's movement in Russia is associated with the research sector. Anna Temkina, Elena Zdravomyslova are people, friends, colleagues whom we've known since the nineties. They participated in educational programs. They visited us, we visited them. Natal'ia Pushkareva, you've always been in our, so to speak, vanguard, and we participated in your projects. You participated in ours. We went to many places, we spoke up, and burned the hearts of men with our words.³⁰

NP: And ordinary women's activism?

EIS: There wasn't much of women's activism in Saratov. My path didn't cross with those activists, except in the case of the women's crisis center headed by Irina Khaldeeva, a remarkable person and an expert. She constantly had projects, received grants, and developed her center. She thought strategically, and she even headed the Association of Women's Crisis Centers at one point. I don't know if she is still doing that. She was the president. She built relations with the state centers for aid to women, family, and children. That's how they were called: "For Aid to Women, Family, and Children." So they weren't women's organizations, this wasn't a women's movement; it was the state system for the care of women, but only in conjunction with family and children. You and I understand that this is a family-promoting ideology. But, nonetheless, Irina with her absolutely feminist ideology and a liberal attitude on women's issues, with her very clear position of radical feminism – she could find the opportunities and reason to interact with the state center because the state centers, the municipal centers had, of course, more resources, for example, in terms of a dormitory, temporary housing for battered women who could stay with their children for a time. So we learned about all this too, we collaborated with them, and participated in many educational programs. Also, in Saratov we had these women's housing committees. But there weren't very many, and we didn't particularly interact with them. I just know they were involved in some of these congresses and programs, but our paths didn't cross. Our women...

NP: And in Moscow?

NP: We didn't have much interaction with activists in Moscow either. There were some women in Saratov who headed a few organizations involved in public service, but not in research. For example, the Jewish Center, the Center for Support of Non-Profits; they were all headed by women. There's was a women's movement in this sense, but but not much in terms of women's rights. It was there more in terms of rights or it provided resources for some important, but not strong, groups or segments of society. Like the non-profits, for example. And unfortunately, I didn't participate in these women's congresses, but I...

NP: You knew that they happened...

³⁰ This is a quote from Russian poet Alexander Pushkin's *Prophet* (1828)

EIS: I knew they happened, yes. I read Gapova and Voronina. I know they handed out aprons to everyone, and that it was very pro-family, conservative,

NP: Pronatalist.

EIS: Pronatalist, yes. Yes, pronatalist, of course. And I had my friends and acquaintances: Zhanna from Petersburg, Elena, of course, Zdravomyslova, Anna Temkina, Zhanna Chernova, Larisa Shpakovskaia. That's our next generation: Zhanna and Larisa. And these are our friends and colleagues, and constant participants in all of our activities, courses, and all those summer schools. Our center existed until 2014. We closed it because there was a wave against foreign agents. And because we received so much Western funding. We also had domestic funding, from the Ministry of Labor and from some regional governments; we even won bidding processes for some social programs and research, but very few of them. We were mostly financed by western funding, and we never thought it was a problem. We earnestly applied for the Public Chamber grants and those new presidential grants.

NP: Who ended up writing the proposals, the texts of the proposals themselves?

EIS: Mostly Pavel and I wrote them. But we had colleagues who did it too.

NP: There were colleagues...

EIS: There were, of course.

NP: Was there anyone in your organization, except maybe an accountant, who was on the payroll?

EIS: We had someone only if we had a project. Because we also had a journal which was funded by grants. We started receiving grants from the MacArthur Foundation around 2006 or 2007 for support of the organization, the Center itself. And part of those grants was for the journal. So, of course, we had editors, proofreaders, executive secretary or editor-in-chief. It's a huge job. And in the Center we had an accountant and this assistant to the accountant, so we had a financial director and an accountant. Because when the schools were running and when we had events...

NP: One general accountant for the journal and the organization?

EIS: Yes, yes. Well, for the entire project. When we had events, we had to do this complicated and complex reporting because every person, every ticket had to be counted. It wasn't easy – it was triple reporting because we had to report to the tax authorities, to the Ministry of Justice, and to the foundations that gave us the grants, all of which had totally different systems and expectations. There were these special charts that we sent to Chicago. That's why we had a lot of work here for the administrative staff. And we had people on the payroll when they were doing research. Many here were quite involved in research work. As a rule, this was related to their dissertations. These were graduate students. Or it was related to the topics they developed. Our entire department was working there, and also because we had these network projects, people from other cities were involved too. But the salaries we gave weren't enough to live on. So these people were also working elsewhere, for a state university, for example. What they had here was

something of a side gig that they looked at not so much as a side gig but as a creative assignment that brought in a little something like a bonus. People would have worked anyway, and would have gone through grad school, and they would write, but we still paid a little for what they did for us.

NP: Did you have a chance work with international women's organizations?

EIS: No, I didn't. Only with research organizations. I know there are international women's organizations, and they give special grants for women. But we just didn't have the time to contact them because we had a major grant from MacArthur, and we successfully extended it.

NP: Until when?

EIS: Until... wait, no, I think it ran out, probably around 2012, when the law on agents was adopted. The amendment to the law, I mean. And then...

NP: After that did you turn to any Russian foundations or agencies for support? Now they announce competitions for public organizations.

EIS: Yes, we did. But we never received anything, except for the few things I mentioned earlier. In our work, maybe not that long ago, maybe in 2009 we submitted proposals for the Public Chamber grants. They had some kind of grant. We applied for grants through the Strategic Institute. But we never received anything. And we thought that this might be due to of our position and our history. Because one of the items on these applications was the ratio of funding received from abroad to funding received from Russia. And I think that item was the basis for them to figure us and others out. Though what did they have to figure out? They knew ahead of time...

NP: So you applied to these Russian foundations like the Prokhorov Foundation... but without any...

EIS: I already applied to the Potanin Foundation³¹ here to support the master's program when I worked at HSE. We applied and received one grant to develop master's courses. And here because Pavel... Pavel and I settled in Moscow completely in 2011. Before that we were going back and forth. But by 2011 that was it. It tough to continue working in Saratov. But we continued to collaborate with people there all the time.

NP: When did you first start coming to Moscow?

EIS: Well, we had been working by rotation since 2003.

NP: In Moscow?

EIS: And since 2008 we were in Moscow most of the time. And in 2011 we stopped working in Saratov. In the beginning, we traveled all the time, managed to teach some short courses at the department in Saratov. But in 2011 our health didn't allow it, and really by that time, they didn't need us for those courses in Saratov anymore.

³¹ See <http://english.fondpotanin.ru/> for more information (accessed August 2017).

NP: I have another delicate question about funding because a lot of people—for example, Ella Panfilova has this foundation “Civil Dignity”—have you contacted those kinds of...?

EIS: No, we didn't.

NP: foundations? They're Russian, but they're...

EIS: Friendly to the idea. No, we didn't. Either those funds did not exist then, or we still had our major grant at the time. Our team was very small. And we had enough resources for what we did. Many graduate students went to Moscow after graduating. Or they left the department. There was no funding. And we never had the goal as a center, “oh, we have to hold on to this person.” We delayed a few of them. I don't know if they would now say they appreciate it, i.e. that they didn't go into business, but nevertheless, they continued working for a period of time at the Department and at our Center. Natasha Sorokina, Olga Bendina, Mariia Vorona, many colleagues. Naturally, our dear friends—Natal'ia Lovtsova, Galina Karpova—they worked all the time, continued, supported, explored and participated. But all of that was coming to an end. And all of that coincided with the fact that Pavel had become ill and we couldn't travel often or for long periods of time because of his limitations. Towards the end the Soros Foundation through Budapest, the Central European University, gave us the HESP³² grant to promote higher education. And we worked with Saratov. We involved several colleagues from Moscow, and universities in Petersburg. But we mostly acted as a Saratov group with our regional network. And we held schools not only in Saratov, but also in Moscow, in Petersburg, and even in Bishkek. And so we...

NP: With annual grants?

EIS: Annual? No, I think that grant was given for three years. It was extended every year..

NP: And this was in the beginning of the 2010s?

EIS: Yes, that was beginning of the 2010s. So we had it in 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013 – something like that. Later, we even had a small grant for Bishkek. And we also held an event with Bishkek on disability issues. And online courses. And at that time there was a problem. Maybe Pavel and I had made a mistake. We had to... Our MacArthur Foundation curator, Galina Ustinova asked, "would it be possible for you to have someone in Saratov to take over because you're in Moscow?" But we were lazy and let it slide. We stayed in Moscow, and there was something going on in Saratov. All of this continued to develop because of the HEPS grant. The journal continued too. Well, actually we transferred the journal to the HSE at the time. In the first years we had a small amount of funding, then we kept the journal alive with a grant, and later we received regular funding from the HSE. And we thought we could relax a bit, and that the journal would continue to exist.

NP: And what years are these, approximately?

³² Higher Education Support Program ("HESP for Advancing Human Rights." Funds for NGOs. March 24, 2015. Accessed February 22, 2018. <https://www.fundsforngos.org/latest-funds-for-ngos/open-society-foundations-hesp-for-advancing-human-rights/>.)

EIS: At some point after 2011, I think, we transferred the journal to the HSE. And then after 2013 we were getting grants to develop the publication. So everything was good, we had enough – it wasn't much, but all the same it was for a foreign proofreader and an editor. They pay me very little, but it doesn't matter. The most important point is that the journal continues to exist. Develops.

NP: The journal exists, but no organization exists?

EIS: The organization does not exist. The way it turned out we just had less and less strength to support it. First of all, Pavel and I were in Moscow. We had never made a decision to hand the Center off to someone. We thought it was all too much: who could we ask to take on such great burden? We were overprotective. Maybe someone would have agreed. Maybe it was possible to turn things around in Saratov, perhaps, to do things a bit differently in Saratov. But it didn't happen.

And, of course, this law on foreign agents undermined the organization. Otherwise, perhaps we may have continued to exist because there are now some new possibilities with domestic foundations. This organization had a great history, remarkable publications and educational activity. It was a friend and a partner of many other major organizations. A partner with Viktor Vrankov's CISR [Center for Independent Social Research] in St. Petersburg and with Larisa Popkova's center...

NP: In Samara?

EIS: In Samara. Wait, is she Larisa?

NP: Liudmila.

EIS: Liudmila. Liudmila Popkova and her Samara Center for Gender Studies. But at that time Pavel passed. He was very ill and all of this was happening at the same time. He was hospitalized for radiation therapy when they sent him this court subpoena, that is to appear at the prosecutor's office. But he was in the hospital. They had to drain fluid from his lungs. And on the day he died, we were included in the Foreign Agent Registry. All of it happened at the same time, and it was very difficult. As his illness progressed, our Center was on its last legs. And then it all ended. And one of the journalists wrote on June 9, 2014, "a Russian scholar died after his organization was included in the Foreign Agents Registry." Of course, it was totally ridiculous. So that's how it happened. We proceeded to close the organization because we didn't want it in the Registry. I know that several organizations included in the Registry still continue to operate and maybe...

NP: They report every three month and suffer from the scrutiny.

EIS: Maybe we could have taken another path. But at that time we had only one choice – to close. We always told ourselves that if we want in the future, we could reopen it. Under a different name. And thanks to our colleagues in Saratov, our accountant, and other colleagues, we brought this whole affair to completion. We paid all money, taxes, fines, and we closed our doors in December of 2014. We were accused of having a website, which stated that we are the Center for Social Policy, and we have schools, and seminars – so to the prosecutor this was politics. Political activity. So the website also had to be closed at one stage of the court proceedings. I guess all the books are still available.

They're online and can be downloaded. Type the title, and you can download it all. We had a huge library there, first of all our Center's publications. We produced just a sea of books and raised a number of new subjects. Not only on gender, but also, for instance, on visual anthropology, and on social policy. So there's that.

After the closure, I had this period in my life when, with Pavel, it was hard for me to answer what the point of scholarship was? Why do we need it? I guess I just thought that was it for me. Because it was just a completed stage of life. But life goes on.³³

NP: Thank you, Elena Rostislavovna, for this conversation and for sharing this with us...

EIS: We were involved in politics, in social policies, including gender policies. I was even included in some working groups under the ministry in Saratov, and we were promoting gender ideology there. In answer to your question about why we don't unite, it seems to me that that's our stage of development right now. First of all, some of them have united. There was a network of gender researchers. There was a network of women's crisis centers. They sometimes crossed paths, interacted, sat at the same round table. And now there are some small constellations that are united and, in particular, your organization, your association.³⁴ That's where people are going because you're holding conferences. That's one foundation of solidarity. I want to say that now those who continue to be involved with gender, specifically in research and in education, are probably looking for support in terms of resources for academic projects. They look at forums, at conferences. They go there and participate. And sometimes I somehow end up there too. Lately I don't travel as much and don't participate in these sorts of things. But sometimes I get to go somewhere, to a conference. They invite me—I don't know—because I do research on family, disability, including gender, and then it turns out they have a project, and they have people from Russia participating.³⁵ We also made a special issue of the journal *International Social Work*, and we were looking for someone who would write to us about Russia.³⁶ We did this "call for papers." And from the articles that were sent I learned that there's an international project with a university in Siberia and another with Americans;

³³ The original transcript contains the following additional paragraph: "And now they're closing the Department of Social Work in Saratov. All this marks the end of a very important and beautiful era, when pioneering research and programs were growing, when new academic trends and practices were developing."

³⁴ Referring here to RAIZhI – the Russian Association of Researchers of Women's History (Association for Women in Slavic Studies. "Association for Women in Slavic Studies (AWSS)." Association for Women in Slavic Studies (AWSS). Accessed February 22, 2018. [http://www.awsshome.org/.](http://www.awsshome.org/))

³⁵ The original transcript adds the following passage here: "Not so long ago, Ol'ga Zdravomyslova invited me to join the community of researchers of girlhood, which includes scholars from Canada, Sweden, and other countries. We prepared a thematic issue of the journal *Girlhood Studies* on girlhood research in the post-soviet states."

Ol'ga Zdravomyslova is a social scientist and the executive director of the Gorbachev Foundation. She has performed research in the areas of sociology, social transformation processes, and gender. ("The International Non-Governmental foundation for socio-economic and political studies (The Gorbachev Foundation) - The Gorbachev Foundation - Руководство." Горбачев Фонд. Accessed February 14, 2018. [http://www.gorby.ru/en/gorbi_fund/guide/show_27833/.](http://www.gorby.ru/en/gorbi_fund/guide/show_27833/))

³⁶ The original transcript notes that this was done with a Karen Lyons.

and it turns out that they're interested in girlhood. Those articles have included domestic violence, for example, which covers gender issues, of course. And Elena Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina just published a new textbook on gender; it's being reviewed now. It's interesting where and who is going to use it because there are almost no such courses now. But the fact is that this activity exists and that there is some kind of network framework, somewhere on Facebook there are groups, which give each other likes, read and critique one another. Ol'ga Zdravomyslova, you probably know, she's promoting this girlhood – the idea itself, studies, conferences, publications, articles – that is, clusters in journals, etc. She is in turn looking for a way to interact with Canadians, with Swedes, with Norwegians, and is creating such a network. So she's here trying to find collaborators and bring them together. I think that some of them are sprouting up, others re-appear from the past, and they try to find new people and to support them; others come from the younger generation. Because now I see now that—while before only Elena Mezentseva was teaching courses on gender at HSE—now I see people speaking up at faculty meetings, or a young man... a young woman in the laboratory. Elena Berdysheva defended her dissertation and gives talks on gender issues now, right? Her dissertation was connected with issues of masculinity. So there are these little things. But, of course, you're right. We're not united. Because... Well, why? It's an interesting question. In terms of values, unity, and cohesion. It's best to say we have many different types and forms of cohesion, and people unite along various priorities. It seems that they can't come to agreements, understand each other and unite. I'm talk about our gender people, if I can call them that. Perhaps, it's a phase. We need to get through it. Small things are important too. Someone has to start the movement. And then we'll join.

NP: I have a final question to conclude us here. What is feminism to you? What does it mean? What does it include for you personally?

EIS: "Feminism" for Pavel and me was always... we always considered ourselves feminists. That was difficult to say because I wanted to say we were *feministki* [the feminine form of the word that is most commonly used]. We were feminist scholars because I think among feminists there can be men, as well as women. Feminism is a position, it's an academic direction, and it is not homogeneous within itself. Within it there are so many heavily discussed and conflicting viewpoints, approaches. But first and foremost, it's a personal position, it's a position that for me has to do not only with women's rights, but also with issues of discrimination. Sometimes we recognize in hindsight that what we've been doing and what we've been saying was discriminatory. This self-reflection and empathy for the disabled, migrants and various ethnicities...