

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

RUSSIA

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Elena Victorovna Kochkina, born in 1956, became involved in gender research in 1990. She received training in gender studies at York University in Great Britain in 1993 and at the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1996. In 1996, she completed her graduate studies at the Institute of Social and Economic Studies of Population under the Russian Academy of Sciences. In the 1990s, she ran the Center of Expert Assistance for Social Initiatives and the gender studies program at the Moscow branch of the Open Society Institute (Soros Fund). She is one of the authors and co-editors of the collection *Gender Reconstruction of Political Systems* (Saint Petersburg: Aleteya, 2003). In 2004 she defended her dissertation entitled *Gender Asymmetry in Power Structures of the Russian Federation: Issues of Political and Legal Regulation* for which she received her Candidate's Degree in Political Science. She provides gender analysis of legal reform in Russia, structural adjustment programs and implementation of equal opportunity policies in Russia, as well as analysis of gender perspectives in the sphere of education in Russia.

At the present time, she is the head of the expert council for the independent non-profit Council on the Issues of Management and Development, and a senior research fellow at the Institute of Social and Economic Studies of Population under the Russian Academy of Sciences. She has conducted over 70 applied sociological research projects and teaches. Some of the courses she teaches include "Feminist Reconstruction of Western Conventional Political Science," "Modern Western Research on Gender Politics," "Feminist Legal Studies in Western Countries" (for students of the Sociology Department).

In 2014, her new monograph was published: *Government Family and Demographic Policy in Russia: Towards the Development of Effective Measures to Increase Birth Rates* (co-authored with V.V. Yelizarov).

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 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. Natal'ia 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:

Natal'ia Pushkareva: Elena Victorovna, please tell us briefly about your background. Where are you at in your life right now? Which of your goals have you been able to accomplish? And what else needs to be done?

Elena Victorovna Kochkina.: Natal'ia L'vovna, are we talking about my research?

N.P.: First of all, we are interested in everything that has to do with women, with the women's movement and with promoting such topics in academia, and with the connection between your personal biography and your research.

E.V.K.: I will try to be brief. We are at the Institute of Social and Economic Studies of Population, where I came in September 1990, almost 26 years ago. Not exactly in the same building and on the same floor, but we are in the Institute's Laboratory on Gender Issues. It was a group of staff members from this laboratory that organized the First Independent Women's Forum. I actually came to one of the first meetings of the organizing committee.

That meeting was held at the Academic Council Chamber of the Institute of Far Eastern Studies, which is in this very building. We had luxurious—the things that you'd see in Soviet times— silk-flooned curtains with tassels and huge tables from Soviet times. I think they are still at the Institute of Far Eastern Studies. Luxurious carved chairs. It was 1990. It was the period when perestroika¹ had already started; every week I attended different events at the Perestroika club at the Central Economic Mathematical Institute (in CEMI, the building across from here). I was there several times. Yes, the Perestroika club was there and also kitty-corner was ISSS [Institute of Scientific Information on Social Sciences], which had all kinds of meetings. And every institute of the Academy of Sciences had a group of left-wingers or liberals, each of which had some sort of discussion meeting once a week... And also, at the Institute of Economics—that's the building just next door, Abalkin's² former institute—they had their meetings too. So everyone was discussing [economic and political reform]... Iavlinskii had his "500 Days,"³ Abalkin had his own program... I think that each institute had its own kind of program. Everyone was asking, "how should we implement reform and enter the club of civilized nations, so we can live better."

I went to one meeting—completely by chance. It was one of those meetings where you discussed something. And I was so surprised that only radical women were there. They were sitting in luxurious chairs, at a luxurious table, and drinking tea from saucers. They had a tea set. There were slices of cake, *sukhariki* [dried bread]. It was all very civilized. Because all the other gatherings... I also went to meetings of groups in nascent opposition,

¹ Perestroika (Russian for "restructuring") was a policy of political and economic reform promulgated by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985. These policies are often cited as catalysts for the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. (Perestroika, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/perestroika-Soviet-government-policy>, accessed August 2017).

² L. I. Abalkin was the director of the Institute of Economics of the Russian Academy of Sciences from 1985 to 2002.

³ In 1990 Dr. Grigorii Iavlinskii developed "500 Days," a program designed to transition the Soviet Union to a market economy. (Dr Grigory Alexeevich Yavlinsky. Accessed February 16, 2018. <http://eng.yabloko.ru/People/YAVL/Yavl.html#2.>)

for example, human-rights advocates. The environment was quite different there. Men were sitting in smoke-filled rooms, drinking *chifir*⁴ with *sukhariki*. And they poured sugar from bags with tablespoons. It was a stark contrast.

At that time, I think I was a third-year student at the Department of Sociology studying political sociology. I spent all my weekends either at rallies with questionnaires and surveys, or at political party congresses, or at the events mentioned earlier, where we... where it was interesting to hear something about the topics that everyone was discussing. I had been involved in several empirical projects; all the time we were processing some data on who is promoting which ideas and how civil initiatives and political parties were being structured. By that time, I had spent my time like this for about a year, and then I attended this meeting. I just had the feeling that something was beginning there that I liked...

NP: What did you like about it?

YV: I'm saying – it all started with teacups. They were all very sweet, no one... Well, usually when men attended similar events—meetings about some "civil initiatives"—they would all attack each other for some reason and there were constant squabbles. They were up all night, doing something by morning; it was all very unhealthy. And here I saw very vibrant, prosperous, attractive, and mentally healthy women. I just liked them. I had a sense that I was in a different environment where I felt comfortable.

And even more interesting: I remember them saying, "Well, what are each of you going to do for the organizing committee?" I was thinking "what should I do?" I really wanted to be with these women. Because when you enter a community, and suddenly you want to get to know them. Want to be with them.

NP: And what kind of social group was this? Who were...

EK: I was getting to that. This was the first meeting of the organizing committee for the Independent Women's Forum.

NP: But someone must have proposed it, how did you know that you had to go there?

EK: I'll tell you. No... I sensed... I am telling you based on my perception. So I was passing by... It was a chance meeting. That is, I knew nothing about the institute, nor about these initiatives, nor the Laboratory on Gender Studies, nor gender; I knew nothing. I just came. I saw nice women, we drank tea, and I liked them. And they organized their committee in a very egalitarian way. They had a way of communicating, that's it, a way of communicating! And I came up with what I would do for the organizing committee. I am a sociologist after all. I was creating questionnaires back then, one questionnaire a week. And I was thinking, here we go! And they had no sociologists just when they needed one. Or someone who would do the work of one. And I remember, when I signed up, no one asked what I can and want to contribute, they just passed around a piece of paper and I

⁴ Chifir is a strong tea associated with and often brewed in Russian prisons. ("Chifir." Wikipedia. February 11, 2018. Accessed February 16, 2018. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chifir%27>.)

became a member. The next meeting was scheduled. Aha, the next meeting was scheduled, and I started regularly attending meetings, and that's when they were talking about the First Independent Women's Forum, which took place in March 1991.

NP: Where?

EK: In Dubna. It's in the Moscow oblast⁵. At the time, Dubna was a closed city.

NP: Why?

EK: It was closed because it's a nuclear research center. The city's main employer is the Center for Nuclear Research. What was extraordinary here is that only 200 people participated in the Forum. The announcement...

NP: How did they get into a closed city?

EK: We published an announcement about the Forum in the newspaper "Moscow Komsomolets,"; such were the times. Someone was interviewed, probably Anastasiia Posadskaia,⁶ the head of the Laboratory on Gender Issues, and she was also a member of the organizing committee.

NP: And when did this laboratory appear here, in this institute?

EK: The laboratory was created a year earlier.

NP: In 1989?

EK: I think sometime in March of 1989.

NP: Who was among the founders besides Anastasiia Posadskaia?

EK: Natal'ia Mikhailovna Rimashevskaja, who, at that time, was the director of the Institute (we are filming now in her office).⁷ The institute was just created: it was assembled from six institutes of the Academy of Sciences: from CEMI [Central Economic Mathematical Institute], the Institute of Economics, the Institute of Market Economy, I think, from Demographics, and, well, several groups. They gave her *carte blanche* to

⁵ The Moscow Oblast, an administrative-territorial unit of Russia, is one of the most densely populated regions in the country. ("Moscow Oblast." Wikipedia. February 15, 2018. Accessed February 16, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moscow_Oblast.)

⁶ Anastasiia Posadskaia is a Russian activist and a leader in the feminist organizations in the USSR. She is one of the founders of the LOTOS (Liberation from Social Stereotypes) group and has helped create the Centre for Gender Studies in the USSR. , she has coauthored with Natal'ia Zakharova and Natal'ia Rimashevskaja an article detailing the "subordination of women in the USSR". (Molyneux, Maxine, and Anastasiia Posadskaia. "Interview with Anastasiia Posadskaia (25 September 1990)." *Feminist Review*, no. 39 (1991): 133-40. doi:10.2307/1395449.)

⁷ Natal'ia Mikhailovna Rimashevskaja is the author of *The Woman, the Man, and the Family in Russia*, a study of the deeply impoverished community of Taganrog. See Klugman, Jenny. «Poverty in Russia Public Policy and Private Responses.» Economic Development Institute of The World Bank. <https://books.google.com/books?id=0MIIUai1XC4C&pg=PA128&dq=taganrog+the+woman+the+man+and+the+family+in+russia&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiKyp3rgozUAhXFhIQKHQ13DmsQ6AEIRzAG#v=onepage&q=taganrog%20the%20woman%20the%20man%20and%20the%20family%20in%20russia&f=false>. (23 May, 2017).

create the Institute of Social and Economic Studies of Population. At that time, the state was advancing the concept of raising the level of people's welfare. For the first time, they started to say that people have problems, we have inequality, we have poverty; it was not acceptable to talk about this earlier. Moreover, we have disadvantaged populations; and the goal of the institute was to develop what is currently called "social doctrine" or "basis of social policy" in a broad sense of the meaning of these terms; or social policy as a narrow part of domestic economic management. And Anastasiia Posadskaia—I don't know the details of how she met Natal'ia Mikhailovna Rimashevskaja—but, as far as I understand, it was with Natal'ia Mikhailovna's help that she was able to defend her dissertation. I suppose it was the beginning of 1989 –the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union had this Committee on Women's issues [Committee on Issues of Women, the Defense of Family, Motherhood, and Childhood]. It was headed by P. Maeva,⁸ and at that time, they were seeking new ideas, various new social ideas. And the Council of Ministers gave an assignment to the Institute, Rimashevskaja created a working group, with the participation of Valentina Ivanovna Matvienko—she is currently the Chairwoman of the Federation Council—at that time she was in the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.⁹ Matvienko was also in charge of..., or at least, had something to do with the Committee on Women's Issues. The Council of Ministers headed by Maeva, Matvienko in the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, and Rimashevskaja in the Academy of Sciences. They coauthored "The Conception on the Improvement of the Status of Women" (it was unclear at the time which women because the Soviet Union was falling apart: Soviet women or Russian women); just "the Improvement of the Status of Women." Originally, Anastasiia Posadskaia included in the title of the Conception issues of equality of the sexes, and even the concept of parenthood. But the title was truncated. However, for the first time a question was raised about the structural imbalance of social roles of men and women in society and about the problems that as a result, arise in economic production and in the system of social inequality. That was a first.

At that time, Zoia Aleksandrovna Khotkina, a present and past staff member of the Laboratory on Gender Issues, joined the group. Zoia Aleksandrovna has been working at this laboratory for 26 years now. Valentina Konstantinovna [also joined] .At that time, she was working at the Russian Academy of State Service. She was a Candidate of Sciences in History and studied international women's movements (specifically, she defended a thesis on the suffragette movement in the Great Britain). Naturally, she brought knowledge of English social politics and their historical context. Olga Aleksandrovna Voronina from the Institute of Philosophy – her dissertation...

NP: At present.

⁸ Maeva was the 1989 head of the Women's Department of the Council of Ministers. (Marsh, Rosalind J. *Women in Russia and Ukraine*. Cambridge: University Press, 2006.)

⁹ Valentina Matvienko has been a prominent female politician in the Soviet Union and Russia. In addition to her work on the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, she has served as the Governor of St. Petersburg and Chairperson of the Federation Council. ("Valentina Matviyenko." Wikipedia. February 13, 2018. Accessed February 16, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valentina_Matviyenko.)

EK: Right, at present... Tat'iana Klimenkova, also from the Institute of Philosophy. So they assembled an interdisciplinary working group, which included economists, like Posadskaia (I think she was still at CEMI), Natal'ia Zakharova. They created an interdisciplinary group that had economists, historians, philosophers... Posadskaia, more or less, conducted sociological studies and Rimashevskaja herself... Rimashevskaja solicited grants for the working group; and she received permission to create the laboratory. She asked Anastasia Posadskaia to lead it. Anastasia agreed, and half of the staff worked part-time because they were working at other academic institutions. This laboratory continues to this day. In 1989 it had the word "gender" in its name. In fact, the term "gender" was introduced into Russian by Anastasia Posadskaia – I remember then it was pronounced as *gen-DYER* or *gen-DIR* (not *gen-DER*, like now); there was no common pronunciation, but this word is 27 years old, and you can see when it was first used in Russia. Yes. It was most likely Rimashevskaja's order to create the Laboratory on Gender Issues at the Institute of Social and Economic Studies of Population in 1990. If we get back to the laboratory's original program, it was interdisciplinary. For 26 years, the laboratory has produced annually one or two collections. The number of books published under the auspices of the laboratory is, I think, in the hundreds. These collections have introduced major constructs into academic usage, which are now actively developing in ordinary usage.

NP: What is the connection between the history of the laboratory and your life?

EK: This laboratory is so unique because its staff did not position themselves as closet scholars, i.e. they don't spend all their time at libraries. From the beginning, they were empirically oriented because the creation of the laboratory and its history had to do with shaping the basis of social policy (still of the Soviet Union), the staff had very strong conceptual structures in terms of how they positioned themselves. And they positioned themselves as agents of social change! Yes, agents for creating new social policies for gender equality. At the same time, they identified with women's civic initiatives. If in 1989 the Laboratory was just created, in 1990, I was still, well, just someone off the street—a student that came off the street; one couldn't just enter the Academy of Science—but at the same time, networks were available that helped people like me.

And already in March 1990, this group assembled 200 people in a closed city, in Dubna! After the First Forum, the Laboratory... Yes, after that forum... Anastasia Posadskaia invited me to work there as a research fellow. Previously, I was an affiliated member who attended meetings of the organizing committee, but that's just... community service. In my opinion, gender studies started as a result of changing social realities; and the changes were found in ordinary people's very identities¹⁰.

There were definitely a lot of utopian yearnings. As a matter of fact, I've been writing a piece about which subjects arose in, say, the first 15 years of gender studies, and, I'm amazed that there was an openness to any and all discourses and disciplines. I don't recall having conflicts. What was so unique about this project is that from the beginning members of the group started with an understanding of the limitations of their academic

¹⁰ Note: This last phrase of this sentence was modified by the translator for readability.

constructs. That is to say, I don't remember any ideological clashes. It seems that we were able to overcome ideological clashes because initially everyone had a right to identify and take any ideological position. We ran the gamut from utopians to neoliberals. And...

NP: And at the first congress in Dubna, which you were talking about earlier...EK:

Right now I am also talking about academic discourse. That is, under a single book cover we had texts of various researchers, who... well... well... We had a very strong and clear position: identify with what you like, find your what your theoretical point of departure, define under which paradigm you're working, which categories you're using. No one demanded justification. It was understood that if you were choosing a particular point of view, you had a right to do that. If you are a post-structuralist – great, if you are a post-modernist – great, if you are a social democrat – great; you could choose whichever...

NP: And if you were more traditional...

EK: whichever methodological position, whichever ideological position. And as for methods... There were no restrictions in the methods either, no preferences. Statistical method, sociological, quantitative, qualitative methods. And it seems to me that the situation was unique... I liked it. I think I still value myself and my work precisely in connection with this community, its open-mindedness and its fundamental democratic freedom of choice. I mean that you can choose any position, and no one would require you to justify it. It's just a very high level of intellectualism: now, when we discuss some nuances, who differs and how and why we think in these constructs; of course, we all understand that it's coming from our personal experiences.

NP: I would like to get back to your participation in the first Independent Women's Forum, to 1991 and to Dubna.

YV: Just before the opening, two days before—the congress opened on a Saturday... the First Independent Women's Forum, by the way, not congress, but forum!—I think it was Saturday, but wait... on Friday morning...

NP: On which dates was it? Was it in March?

EK: It was March. I don't remember the exact dates, I think it was in the twenties of March...

NP: After International Women's Day?¹¹

EK: I'd need to see, I don't remember now. Was it before March 8 or...

NP: So it had nothing to do with International Women's Day, the fact that it was in March, because March is a special month for special magazine issues, when everything that has to do with women comes out.

¹¹ International Women's Day has been celebrated by the United Nations since 1975. It was first celebrated in 1909. This date is referenced in many of our Global Feminisms interviews, and marks a day when there are many events celebrating the impact and legacy of women. ("Women, women's day, gender, 8 March, equality." United Nations. Accessed February 16, 2018. <http://www.un.org/en/events/womensday/history.shtml>.)

EK: I don't remember the details, we possibly... We'll have to check what day in March... I can't say the date. The date was moved up a little. I think the Forum was held in March 21-23. It's possible that we couldn't do it on March 8th, didn't have time to organize it by then, or someone couldn't arrive at that time. And the concept for the Forum itself was, again, subject-based. We wanted to discuss politics, of course. The involvement of women in the political process was of great interest at the time, because we had just had elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, and we saw that women did well... things looked good. Nevertheless, everyone understood that interest would decrease,, that is, everyone who participated – and among the participants in the First Forum were women who had lost in the 1989 elections.¹²

For example, one of the organizers of the forum—by the way, *zhensovety*¹³ of all closed cities were very active—one of the members of the Organizing Committee, Olga Aslabenkovna Bessolova, had considerable trouble in winning her 1989 campaign.¹⁴ She had campaign events in all academic towns, at that time she was an assistant director on social policy at TsAGI, so she had connections in all "academic towns". But nevertheless, she...

NP: What does "TsAGI" stand for?

EK: Central Aerohydrodynamic Institute in the city of Zhukovskii; it's basically Soviet NASA. They were involved in experimental development and prototyping of aircraft . They also had a training base there for cosmonauts. TsAGI had a very active *zhensovety*. *Zhensovety* were then in all closed cities. That is, all the military and industrial cities had very powerful *zhensovety*. And when she was campaigning, she came to the Soviet Women's Committee, but they didn't include her in their list of candidates... But the

¹² In 1989 the Congress of People's Deputies of the Soviet Union held its first elections. The legislative body had been formed the previous year by Gorbachev as part of his reform agenda. Out of the 750 spaces reserved for public organization representation, the Soviet Women's Committee was allocated 75 of those seats. ("Parliamentary Chamber: Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR." UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS. Accessed February 23, 2018. http://archive.ipu.org/english/parline/reports/arc/2263_89.htm.)

¹³ *Zhensovety*, or *Zhenskie sovety*, were local groups established in 1958 by Nikita Khrushchev to increase women's participation in Soviet politics and local organizing. While their work stagnated under Brezhnev, Gorbachev returned resources to them and encouraged participation, resulting, by 1988, in a membership of over 2 million. In 1988, Gorbachev reorganized the administration of the *zhensovety*, placing them under the Soviet Women's Committee. After the reform of the Soviet electoral system in 1988, the *zhevsovety* were allocated 75 seats in the 750-member Congress of People's Deputies. ("Zhensovety." Encyclopedia of Russian History. Accessed February 16, 2018. <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/zhensovety>.)

¹⁴ Olga Aslabenkovna Bessolova graduated from the Moscow Aviation Institute. She has long worked as an activist for women's rights, and still does so today. She is currently a member of the Moscow public council, where she chairs the commission of the Public Council for Improving the Quality of Life of Muscovites; she is also Vice President of the organization Graduate Women of Russia, which supports women in higher education ("Our Team." Graduate Women of Russia. Accessed June 28, 2020. <http://graduatewomenofrussia.ru/>)

massive human capital of these *zhensovet* was invested in the Forum's Organizing Committee. They [the organizers of the First Independent Women's Forum] visited several towns... There were *zhensovet* in Troitsk, Chernogolovka, and Pushchino, and in TsAGI too... I don't know why we didn't organize the forum in Zhukovsky. I think, in Zhukovsky, possibly she could have [organized a no less impressive women's forum]. But the *zhensovet* in Dubna was a very influential group, and they offered the best accommodations. Because they had an international conference center. And because we were expecting international participants, the Organizing Committee wanted to do everything at an international level. Dubna had a world-class conference center, an opportunity to have interpreters working in two or three languages. There was the hotel "Dubna", it had European levels of comfort. It was very nice...

NP: Was the topic of feminism or the feminist movement discussed at the forum, I mean precisely these words and terms?

EK: I'm telling you now why Dubna was selected. There wasn't... It was a meeting of *zhensovet* and a group of public policy experts from the Academy of Sciences. Many other activists learned about it through a piece in *Moskovskii Komsomolets*; for example, a woman came, I remember, by the name of Natalia Sabtsina, from Kemerovo. She was part of the miner's union...

NP: Sabtsina?

EK: Sabtsina.

NP: Sabtsina.

EK: Sabtsina, yes. A member of the miners' union, that is... then... Those engineers and miners, who were then one of the driving forces behind activist civil initiatives... For us that was... And the trade union movement, *zhensovet*, the Academy of Sciences – the forum was made up of those organizations. Of course, that was...

NP: Where were the representatives of the Academy of Sciences, the Center for Gender...

EK: I was there as a sociology student who created a questionnaire and conducted a survey. We then surveyed everyone: who, what, why. The data were then, I think, published later, but I didn't write the report. I think Valentina Konstantinova wrote the report on the survey. We had a political agenda, a cultural agenda, because at that time, despite the fact that there was a lot of openness during perestroika, the mass media was spewing quite a bit of negative, traditionalist discourses.¹⁵ That is, the backsliding had begun. Anastasia Posadskaia called it a "post-socialist patriarchal Renaissance". It was a surprisingly conservative... a discharge of the entire range of conservative theses. There was a separate section devoted to that subject. All women who were socialized as professionals, as mothers, who had highly successful careers, suddenly had to justify

¹⁵ Traditionalism was a discourse integral to the nationalist, monarchist, and orthodox ideologies that became increasingly influential as the Soviet Union fell apart. (Parland, Thomas. *The extreme nationalist threat in Russia: the growing influence of Western rightist ideas*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005.)

themselves, to explain why they were working. Well, this was 1991. That's how it was... The topic of the economy... At that time, everyone had begun to talk about how women's wages were 40% lower than men's. It was the time when people had finally started to talk about it, though Soviet research had long since disclosed the fact. The labor economists and sociologists in all workplaces had been reporting on this for years but it entered public discourse now for the first time, and it was a revelation, because no one ever knew that discrimination was so fundamental, that it touched everything, including wages for entire sectors of the economy, all the "B" group. (We had the "A" group was the entire military-industrial complex and heavy industry, and then there was the "B" group). We discussed politics, culture economics; there was a separate discussion on the women's movement. That is, there were two divisions: one on the political participation of women, and another one on civil initiatives. There were no problems discussing the issues that were raised. There were about 20 international participants: for instance, Cynthia Cockburn from England was there. She was representing, or was affiliated with the European Association of Socialist Feminists; also Armorer Wason¹⁶ came from England, I think she was also connected with that European forum of socialist feminists, or whatever it's called. There were no problems with word the "feminism", true. People used it and discussed it; I think there was a separate session at the forum, which can be seen in the Forum's documents. The word "gender" was used less because it was such a scholarly word, and of course... But the main issue, the main questions that were discussed, were those of gender equality between men and women. That is, we discussed the "male-female" dichotomy. Gender was in the background; it was spoken about, but as concerns gender politics, only myself and possibly ten people from the Laboratory on Gender Issues could discuss it, so we didn't bring those issues to the attention of the 200 participants.

So, if you look at the last 26 years, we've, of course, come a long way. In my view, possibilities for the discussion and interpretation of the Soviet period and the experience of reform have increased by an order of three. That is, by my estimates, in Russia, the number of academics who are currently using gender studies methodology is at least five thousand. If we add up all the dissertations, if we look at disciplines (I did an analysis on 2006), in every discipline of the humanities and social sciences dissertations were defended specifically on the subject of gender inequality. We won't dwell on the quality of methodological research in these dissertations. However, on its own, the issue of female-male dichotomy is present in academia now. In these 26 years, in all disciplines, humanities, social sciences and in natural science...

If you take, for instance, medicine, physiology or biology, you can find it there too.

NP: As is well known...

¹⁶ Armorer Wason currently works for the Ukraine branch of the group HealthProm, which, per the group's website, "works to promote the health and social inclusion of vulnerable children and their families in the UK, Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Afghanistan." ("Our Team." HealthProm. Accessed June 28, 2020. <https://www.healthprom.org/pages/7-established-in-1984>)

EK: I believe that it's a huge intellectual breakthrough, a great achievement of the Academy of Sciences. It's been successful. That is, we can now discuss the subtleties of methodology; what we understand a particular category means; what concepts we are working with... And this process—unfortunately, it's not happening now, although after 26 years it would be timely to do some reflection... It's time...

The second social achievement, which we can attribute to the Laboratory and the whole RAS is that within the past 26 years, every 3-4 years, the Laboratory and its associated groups have participated in the development of various social policies. I think that over these 26 years we have been able to sustain the social democratic standards of equality between men and women from the Soviet period. And that's also a great achievement. We could definitely do more... But the fact that achievements in civil rights of the Soviet Union have not been surrendered—I'm not sure exactly—but I think not one of those achievements have been surrendered at the level of the courts; that's a victory. However, regarding sexual harassment, yes, this section was removed from the Criminal Code, we could not defend it because at the time it was at issue, we didn't have any criminal defense lawyers in our group. It was removed because there were no statistics supporting it. But, in the big picture, all the major achievements of the Soviet Union have been retained. And we owe that to the fact that for 26 years the State Duma's Committee on Women; and also now the Federation Council always has 10-15 women-experts who are, more or less, connected with this Laboratory

NP: With which laboratory? The Moscow Center for Gender Studies...

EK: The Moscow Center for Gender Studies... I'm talking about the Academy of Sciences right now, which...

NP: Which laboratory then?

EK: The Laboratory for Gender Issues,, yes...which has used its academic and scholarly status to protect these constitutional achievements.

For example, we can say that we now have Article 19, on equality between men and women, in the Constitution, and it remains there. That was the individual heroic act of Liudmila Zavadskaja. Because the Soviet Women's Committee, which is now the Women's Union of Russia, sent her—at the time, she was an employee of the Institute of State and Law—to the constitutional convention. We asked her later, "why does that article talk about motherhood and say nothing about fatherhood?" And she replied, "Elena, because none of us were in that working group!"

So the Russian Constitution bears the influence of one discourse and another. Yes, it has one view which is maternal, I mean biocentric—it insists that the main function of a woman is to give birth, and men should provide the rest... But it also contains a principle of gender equality. The equality of the sexes. This position was due to the fact that gender experts weren't present in all the groups that wrote the constitutional frameworks and the laws. Not in all the groups... However, a fundamental list of the concepts important to gender theory has been retained in the constitution. Though not everywhere.

NP: I want to get back to your biography: how was your personal life connected to the Laboratory on Gender Issues at ISESP and the Moscow Center for Gender Studies (MCGS)?

EK: Let me recall... how, for example, in Poland, abortion rights were lost.¹⁷ Here in Russia the battle over abortion has gone on for 26 years, this season it's going again – now its 27th season; and there is always a risk that the conservatives will pick one of those women's rights and take it away. The neoconservative-nationalist, and fundamentalist factions are very active. They may be strong, but I think that the gender agenda is very well represented on the political front, and it's possible to find compromises even with... neo-nationalists and neoliberals, all the while still occupying our position clearly on all points. We have a quite powerful gender lobby.

NP: Tell me about the Second Women's Forum which happened shortly after the first one.

EK: One of the decisions of the First Forum was to build a network of women's social initiatives; and... at the end of November 1992, the Second Forum was held and 500 women attended it. They had a problem with finding enough accommodations because Dubna had too few hotels and no dormitories; participants were hosted in people's homes. I remember that one month in advance we asked people who were not registered not to come. So there was so much interest that we could have filled the Kremlin's Palace of Congresses! And all this was without any organizational support.

NP: How was it organized then, if... there was no internet at the time, no mobile phones, how did you...

EK: No, we had internet. Why do you say that?. That institute had internet.

NP: Did everyone really have email? In 1992?

EK: Definitely not. The internet was used mostly for communication with international participants. With our people we did everything by phone. I really wanted to do our interview at the Laboratory on Gender Issues because that same phone in there. It rang constantly those days. I remember that as the Second Forum approached, we didn't leave the office...

NP: And how did you get their contact information, addresses, phone numbers? You had a database...

YV: They just called us. There was no database. The phone just rings, you pick it up, and they say: "please register me, I would like to come to the Forum." You write first name, last name...

NP: How did people find out? Did you announce it anywhere?

¹⁷ Abortion rights in Poland have been a contentious issue throughout the 20th century, and from 1932 to 1996 there were many changes in laws regulating abortion, specifically regarding the criteria for a legal abortion. Abortion is now illegal in Poland except in the case of rape, endangerment to the life of the mother, or a stillborn child.. (Nowicka, Wanda. "The Struggle for Abortion Rights in Poland." In *Sexpolitics: Reports from the Front Lines*. <http://www.sxpolitics.org/frontlines/book/pdf/sxpolitics.pdf>)

EK: Yes, there was information, we sent a mailer to participants from the First Forum. I worked on that, I was the executive secretary for the Organizing Committee. All the errors that happened as a result... I am responsible for those, there were awfully long lines. Yes, there was a mailer for participants of the First Forum; and we did a series of announcements on the radio, we gave out our phone number; and that that phone rang, like a hotline, constantly. And two months before the Second Women's Forum we had to close registration because all our lists were full.

But the Dubna women, they... Yes, but when... when the last train arrived that night, that night before the opening some time... at midnight, 20 more people arrived. I remember how I gave away my room and slept in the hotel lobby. I clearly remember how Galina Bodrenkova, a deputy of the Moscow Soviet [currently, she is President of the Russian Volunteer Development Center] and Valerii Borshchov [a Moscow Soviet Deputy, Christian Democrats Union]... We couldn't refuse them.

The Second Women's Forum was much bigger; it was held at another place. They had a major sanatorium with a large conference hall; it was held at the sanatorium off-season, we had about 15 sections... The plan for the Second Forum was that we would do sections instead of two days of plenary meetings. And each section was organized well, included knowledgeable chairs – about 20 people. There were discussions and specific proposals. I remember when later at night we were putting all the proposals together, when we were writing the resolution for the First Forum – I remember that a woman from Holland put in some wording about structural reconstruction and the policies of international financial institutions. Those words stuck with me and I still don't understand what they mean. But now more than ever... When I open—occasionally, I open and read them—I see that the major critical positions that were presented and recorded in the proceedings of the First and Second Forums – all of them were justified. And for the past 26 years we have been working to lower costs and risks, working with those neoliberal policies that were in the works then. They did not then become law but would soon. 1992 was over, November... and the worst began in 1993. 1993-1994 were the years of Gaidar's reforms.¹⁸ In 1993 Yekaterina Filippovna Lakhova, who supported the Second Women's Forum, she attended it... We wanted to invite Hillary Clinton, we invited Naina Yeltsin... I remember, at that time, we even considered inviting the Secretary-General of the United Nations, because we thought that everyone should take notice: 500 women were gathered here, they held 20 meetings, wrote up everything in an organized manner, how it's supposed to be... We thought that this was the basis of the politics, we wanted to see implemented. At that point, the Soviet Women's Committee had fallen into a difficult situation because...

NP: Did it continue to exist?

¹⁸ Egor Gaidar, Prime Minister of the Russian Federation in 1992, instituted a series of drastic economic reforms to privatize state assets and create a market economy. These severe reforms dramatically impacted the lives of many Russians and forced many into poverty. ("Yegor Gaidar." Wikipedia. February 03, 2018. Accessed February 16, 2018.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yegor_Gaidar#Reforms_controversy.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yegor_Gaidar#Reforms_controversy))

YV: Of course.

NP: Headed by Tereshkova?

YV: No, it was Fedulova at that time. She wasn't... Tereshkova at that time was the head of Rossotrudnichestvo. That's a division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and Alevtina Fedulova was then heading the Committee., She was not a well-known political figure, she never really gained a status for herself on the Soviet, or all-Soviet, or even Russian level. Only those who were involved in women's initiatives remember her. It's surprising that we didn't squabble with the Committee of Soviet Women in its final days. Their initiatives existed concurrently, all initiatives that were started then never made the claim: "give us power because we have the absolute truth!" But everyone was very active... And this discourse on women's rights and opportunities, which was then initiated, later entered the 1995 Beijing Declaration and formed the basis for all policies launched in the next 10 years.

That is, up until 2004, when another Concept of Gender Equality was written on the state level. Until then, we still had had hopes that it would be possible to make social democratic changes in that reform package.

NP: There were no more Independent Women's Forums after 1992?

YV: The matter is... that in 1993 we had some events locally every week... In 1996, I was a project coordinator for the creation of an internet network for women's organizations.

For example, we traveled, I think, to 10 different organizations located in the biggest cities across the Russian Federation; all of them, indeed, were included. That is, a large network of women's organizations was working in 1996, and events were happening at the regional level every month. In other words, a phase of regionalization had begun. For example, those who had participated in the First or Second Forum held their meetings, among them were the Alliance of Women of the Don: they covered a huge region, including the whole Rostov area, the Stavropol Krai, Krasnodar and the North Caucasus. Yes, it was done by the Alliance of Women of the Don and personally by Valentina Cherevatenko. There was some congress in Irkutsk, I don't remember what it was called – it was the Baikal region, Irkutsk oblast [the Baikal Regional Women's Alliance "Angara"].

NP: So there was a real connection with local women's movements?

EK: They actually built a network down to the local *zhensovet*. Or, say, the Congress of Women of the Kola Peninsula... What happened was that the most powerful women in the country met – then later they didn't have time... To hold our third forum we'd need the Kremlin's Palace of Congresses! But, by that time, there was no need for a forum anymore, because the subject-specific events were happening on a smaller scale. On specific subjects...

NP: That situation lasted until the early 2000?

EK: I think the next large-scale event after the First and Second Forums was Beijing,¹⁹ at that time some 200 women visited Beijing.

NP: What year was that?

EK: It was 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women, organized by the UN. It was attended by five thousand women from all over the world, and about 200 from the Russian Federation.

NP: You participated personally...

EK: I was the coordinator of our delegation; I was on all the committees of the European and international level, these women's NGO's. That's why the attendance from Russia was one of the highest. I think, we were third after the Chinese and the Americans. And what came out of this event in Beijing is that we, 200 women, mastered the entire discourse of new policies. In fact, the Beijing platform became for us like an expanded Bible; you were always able to open it, the words were there; and you knew that it was backed up by experience of women from all over the world. We started working on projects after Beijing, we started to do very concrete things.

NP: Who supported these projects? Who financed them?

EK: I was involved in the project group which was financed by Western funds and agencies of the United Nations. It seems to me, we had connections with all the agencies and participated as experts. For example, in terms of my personal participation, I even worked with the International Monetary Fund. So who weren't we working with?! By that time, the Russian Federation already had a large group of women experts—including sociologists and economists—so there was no shortage of candidates who would go somewhere to participate. All of this was summarized afterwards as part of some conference activity.

NP: Which funds could smaller organizations approach to ask for support?

YV: If it was a project for democratization and support of women's initiatives... And by 1995 it became very clear that neoliberalism was the order of the day. Privatization had been carried out and all social programs were being cut; polarization and inequality increased; a huge areas of poverty and social disadvantage appeared; there was nothing we could do... I wanted to tell you—we were aware of it at the time—that our agenda suffered a major setback. At that time, Ekaterina Filippovna Lakhova,²⁰ an adviser to

¹⁹ The United Nations Fourth Annual World Conference aimed to highlight the obstacles that women face entering public and political spheres around the world and to promote justice, equality, and peace. The conference was a major opportunity for groups to promote women's empowerment and for network building among organizations. ("Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995." United Nations. Accessed February 15, 2018. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/fwcwn.html>.)

²⁰ Ekaterina Lakhova is the chairperson of the Women's Union of Russia, member of the Federation Council Committee for the Federal System, Regional Policy, Local Governance and Affairs of the North, and senator from the Bryansk Region. (Interview by Vladimir Nesterov. Exclusively for Vestnik Kavkaza. "Ekaterina Lakhova: "A woman is designed so that she can save family, peace, Russia"." Vestnik Kavkaza.

President Yeltsin, organized a meeting of her working group—she had an expert working group under President Yeltsin's administration—with Gaidar. And Anastasia Posadskaia, as a representative of that working group, proposed a package of reforms. From 1989 we had a Concept for the Advancement of the Status of Women. Clearly, in the course of eight years, err six years, it wouldn't be difficult to update the Conception with new statistics. At that time, all of us lived in "the 72-hour mode" – we all tried to make changes to this neoliberal package. Gaidar was also an economist; however, he was not from the Academy of Sciences (he worked as an information officer for the magazine "Communist," and because of his education and background, he respected people from the Academy of Sciences). He respectfully told Anastasia Posadskaa and Ekaterina Filippovna, "What you are suggesting is a social democratic reform package. But we coordinated a neoliberal one with the World Bank!" And for me – I write this in all my publications, I include that quote. Because later, probably in 1993, when Lakhova issued the Presidential Decree on Improving the Status of Women, it was for the sake of appearances. In other words, it wasn't included in the reform package.

NP: What were the main differences between your package and the neoliberal one?

EK: No, first of all, "differences" doesn't do it justice. The social support infrastructure that existed, was destroyed as part of privatization in the neoliberal package. It was a dismantling of the welfare state. 80 percent of all social infrastructure was housed in workplaces. And that was destroyed when everything was privatized and restructured.. That's how the Soviet Union or Russia was left without daycare centers. And without summer camps. And without sanatorium-resort services. And the promise that all of it would be invested in wages was never realized. In fact, what we have is best called a manipulation and redistribution of public wealth for the benefit of a narrow group.

NP: How did it reflect on your work in the second part of the 1990s? After 1993?

YV: And we were thinking afterwards: "ok, if we had failed on the federal level, on an all-Russian level, on the state level – we were thinking that there was nothing we could do. Our strongest lobbyist, Lakhova, did everything she could. That was it. Nothing more could be done. Privatization had begun, women were losing jobs, their income; there was massive unemployment; the entire welfare structure had disappeared, yes... and people were surviving on just their personal gardens. What could be done here? At that time we made decision to expand this group because it supports ideas of social and gender equality. And a project on gender education was launched. That's all that could have been done at the time. Actually, we are at the same level now.

NP: At the level of the second half of the 1990s.

EK: I think the quantity... but if we turn to public awareness—I was talking more about political shifts— then we can see that some advances have definitely been made. The illusion, which we had 26 years ago, has... or yes, that "quasigender"... Elena

Accessed February 16, 2018. <http://vestnikkavkaza.net/interviews/Ekaterina-Lakhova-%E2%80%9CA-woman-is-designed-so-that-she-can-save-family-peace-Russia%E2%80%9D.html>.)

Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina had another metaphor for the illusion... “quasigender consciousness”?... “quasisocialist” ...

NP: Patriarchy?

EK: Their term was really nice, it was four words. Posadskaia’s diagnosis was “postsocialist patriarchy.” But they had a good diagnosis too... In any event, the majority of women led a life in which they combine motherhood with employment, and they were as the heads of household and family breadwinners. That was the vast majority of women in our country. And all the while they had dreamed about finding that strong man that would solve all their problems. And all social, economic, and political trends only aggravated the situation. Within the last 26 years, gender issues have evened out in our culture I would say that now the number of women who support feminist perspective has increased by comparison with the nineties.

NP: With the start of the nineties.

EK: Yes, the early nineties because there were plenty of illusions at that time. But now any woman, who drives a car and has her own apartment... very rarely would she exchange it for the illusion that a husband might appear—and who knows where he would come from; if he hasn’t come for the last forty years, then he’s probably not coming after forty either—and make her happy. Many strong advances are happening in overcoming gender stereotypes. Gender researchers who have studied public opinion, socialization (psychologists and social scientists played a very important role here), they’ve noted that we’re now seeing some stabilization as a result of gender studies scholars’ work as ideologues. That is, we have maintained and deepened the understanding of gender constructs in these 20 years. They were described by the experts; the journalists read their reports, an entire school of psychologists has come up, and they know that if they want to have clients, they should use feminist methodology. Because when you tell 80 percent of women of this country that they need to wait until he shows up, that then you can stay at home, at your hearth – it’s unprofitable, I think, for the entire system of social production. There is something positive in that. In my opinion, that superstructure that is now forming culture is the result of gender studies scholars.

But we haven’t been able to influence overall structural processes, the fundamental processes, but that’s what happened. Let’s not discuss if there was a chance, if it was possible to do anything... But as concerns the normalization of new ideological constructs and our influence on society, for example, now, when I watch a soap opera and I see what’s going on... a police officer comes to a man about his alimony payments. A screenwriter... some screenwriter sat down and wrote—this is a soap opera—and in the text what the policer officer says—this is a female police officer. She talks with the deadbeat, and in the course of their communication another woman appears. The women talk to each other and say something like this, “Well, this man, he is an unsuccessful gender construct.” When I hear that, I feel that all my life hasn’t been in vain. Because if the police officer—err, these two young women in their thirties—in their daily lives position themselves to the deadbeat with such emotional... if they say, “he’s just an

unsuccessful gender construct,"²¹ then yes, I feel that we have accomplished a great deal. We have been able to form the next generation, to form a new identity policies for an entire generation of women. The next generation. And that's huge. In my opinion--I wrote about it ten years ago—we have been able to defend our views in the culture, and they have spread.

For example, it is no coincidence that gender... that... Natal'ia Kamenetskaia—I was just thinking about this—named her project "Femme Art." As I recall, it was some kind of phantasmagoric exhibition... when it closed... it was two days before the United States bombed Iraq. We invited representatives of 60 embassies for the closing of the exhibition; the ambassador of Iraq and the USA ambassador were there. It was hosted by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. We expected Valentina Ivanovna Matvienko at the close of the exhibit. So, you see, during the exhibit, we, as an art community, a cultural community, created an environment in which we hoped that on a geopolitical level it would be possible to see reason... That they will change their minds and find a way out (at that time it wasn't clear what would happen). I remember that we offered a soft format: we sent invitations to 60 embassies; ambassadors did not come from all of them; I think there were about 12 people, but that was a lot. We played at world diplomatic policy and created a space. We did what I think women's clubs had done during the French Revolution, when they were creating their own women's networks.

NP: Was it possibly due to the liberal stance that was shared by many ambassadors at the time? And in connection with this, I would like to ask about the Second Women's Congress which was in 2008 (100 years after the First Russian Women's Forum in Petersburg in 1908). What role did the laboratory, the Center for Gender Studies, women's and other organizations play here?

EK: By the way, towards 2008... well, starting in 1996, we published a directory of independent women's organizations in Russia, which listed 2000 organizations. That is, we already created the database, and I think that there was no point to meet at forums again. It was clear that new initiatives were emerging every year. But many of the new women's non-profits did not even register; there were many registered ones and a huge number of initiatives. The group which... Elena Nikolaevna Ershova, as I understand it, was among the first initiators, and Svetlana [Grigor'evna] Aivazova... We should note that Svetlana Aivazova was at that time [lead research fellow] at the Institute of International Labor Movement, yes... And Elena Nikolaevna Ershova was a research fellow at the Institute for USA and Canadian Studies. By 2008, the group of political originators of the various projects, who were the closest to Lakhova, ... they wrote many amendments, and Svetlana Aivazova was for a long time advisor for a fraction of the State Duma and for Lakhova personally. They were the initiators, in 2008 they organized congress in the Hall of Columns at the House of the Unions.²² I remember, when we saw the congress and

²¹ She is indicating with this term that he is not living up to the gendered male role as a provider.

²² The House of Unions used to be where the noble assembly of Russia would congregate for balls and receptions in the 1700's and became a cultural meeting place during the Soviet period. During those years, the space was used for the congresses of deputies, concerts, and artistic events and hosted a number of

how it had political support, yes. At that moment, it had the political support of Ekaterina Filippovna Lakhova... And it must be understood that it was a rather backward stage of Russian state policy. And I remember how (I am not going to mention their name, I am not certain if, in our current political situation, that person would appreciate if they knew that I was quoting them). I would say that this person, who did comparative analysis of the achievements, strategies and tactics of women's movements, said that on its own, the structure of the Declaration, which we created for its 2008 anniversary, was weaker, than a century ago, in 1908.

I did not do comparative analysis at that time. My life then went in a slightly different direction, and I had to work as an economist in the business sector. That's why I participated in preparing for the 2008 congress, but only on an ideological level... I just continued with my method of participant observation. I was not a part of the organizing committee. The congress had such a dispiriting effect on me; we lost our motivation at the time. Because as soon as the women's initiatives with which I was and am connected now... when someone meets... I think that sometime before 2004 we... if a document or declaration was created, it was written sincerely. It was associated with personal experience and, at times, with utopian ideals and desires. Olga Voronina always said, "Let's write more!" I always said, "what did you write here? We want global gender equality by 2005!" And Voronina always responded, "The greater the demands, the greater dividends we'll get from it." That's a bit of history between us.²³

By 2008, the political setbacks had started. It was a period when political relationships with the West began to cool down; and at that time "witch hunts" began. Yes, it started in 2006; and, I recall, the "witch hunts" possibly started sometime in 2004²⁴. Because in 2004 masked men came to Ozerkovskaia Naberezhnaia [riverbank] [where the Moscow office for the Open Society Soros Fund was located]. And after that raid at the Soros Fund office we closed the women's program.²⁵

NP: The Open Society Fund.

EK: Yes, yes, yes... Then...In all of this, we clearly saw developments in terms of everything that we saw in the media that had to do with relationships between Russia and the USA

prominent artistic, social, and political figures in Russia. ("Soviet time. House of Unions." *Советское время. Дом Союзов*, domsojuzov.ru/sovetskoe-vremya.)

²³ The Global Feminisms Project has an interview with Olga Voronina. See the GFP Russia Site for more details at: <https://glblfem.sites.uofmhosting.net/en/russia>

²⁴ <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/440350>

This piece says that workers of the property-holding company "Sektor-1" raided "Open Society" after it refused to pay the new rental agreement, which was 12 times what the original contract stipulated.

²⁵ Open Society Foundations is a philanthropic organization founded by George Soros that supports civil society groups and projects with the aim of promoting justice, education, and social welfare. ("Open Society Foundations." Wikipedia. February 13, 2018. Accessed February 15, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_Society_Foundations.)

and the West. These are, of course, scenario plans that were worked out above and then implemented.

As a participant in various projects and events, I always kept in mind that everything that I observe... I'm not seeing the process as a whole. I have always told myself: there will come a time when you will understand what it was and understand it from a different perspective. So my main objective has been to remember the meaning of an event as I had observed it. But as someone who has a background in sociology, I try to be historically self-aware; I am always curious to look at an event (for example, that masked men came to Ozerkovskaia naberezhnaia) from a temporal distance, suppose from a perspective of 300 years later. In my opinion, there is room for many interpretations... What happened then... But this was an unambiguous attack! Towards this time, Western foundations had already completed the withdrawal of support for the democratization of Russia because they considered that their project was complete. What does "project complete" mean? Was it complete because it failed? Or because it was entering the next stage; for example, supporting protests. – I mean what we observed in the next, say, 4 years – at Bolotnaia Square.²⁶ I definitely understand that we are part of multiscenario plans; and it would, of course, be interesting to describe right now who knows what from different perspectives. That's why I try to adhere to such a macrosociological or macroeconomic approach. We now know exact numbers for divorces, for abortions... With regard to abortion, we definitely know that we have had a contraceptive revolution. That's great. Transnational corporations...

NP: The nineties.

EK: Transnational corporations, which are the motors of globalization... they have, we'll say, an ambiguous role.

I am not a supporter of that concept of globalization, which is now in vogue, but what multinational corporations have done with the reproductive behavior of Russian women – that's great. If it caused the number of women who could avoid having an abortion because of contraceptive use to increase – that's clearly very good. From the point of view of women's health, in terms of psychological self-awareness, the situation that we have, the religious interpretations that flood the media – it's clearly very good. But on some other issues, we can't have... I don't have an unambiguous position. I can say that on some issues...

NP: What is the difference between the contemporary women's movement here and in the West? Are there some obvious differences, and in what, if such differences exist, then in what do we differ from those forms of organizations that exist abroad, and from the goals that they have?

²⁶ On December 10th, 2011 a protest was held at Bolotnaia Square. People gathered to protest the 2011 election results. The list of demands included: freedom for political prisoners, annulment of the election results, the resignation of Vladimir Churov (head of the election commission), and democratic and open elections.

EK: For me it's difficult to talk about how the women's movement in Russia differs from the one in the West because I was never involved in comparative analysis...

NP: But there are contrasts, to be sure...

EK: I wanted to... later because... In the sociology of international movements, yes, you have comparative sociology; it's a separate school that does comparative analysis... I took part in a group and participated in their project ten years ago; and they had 12 countries in the study... They did a comparison of reproductive policies; for example, they looked at abortion in terms of state policy for the past 25 or 50 years; it's an entire methodology. I'm trying to remember now: from England we had an Alla Vindusky, and from America we had a...

NP: A tough question, right?

EK: And then you create the methodology, you compare 12 countries on the same type of policy; then you can say how women's initiatives in, say, France, Poland, America or Russia, differed – there would be differences in along social and class divides. I haven't seen a good analysis for what you're asking. That's why, as a researcher, as a sociologist, I could only talk about my impressions on this subject... yes, possibly... only some impressions... For the conference in Beijing and after it, I was on all the coordinating committees that were created around the UN. I was on all of them and represented either Russia or the CIS countries, or the former socialist bloc... But, for example, from the discussion of the Beijing Platform or the coordination of workshop time slots or agendas, or the arrangement of presenters for plenary meetings (all of this is organizing skills, I am an activist – and around me are 200 women from other countries, each of them representing her region) – it's impossible to come up with any general conclusions from all these interactions! As a sociologist, I can't compare, how social initiatives in these countries differ from those in Russia. I believe that...

NP: But does the Laboratory, the Center for Gender Studies, have contacts with women's organizations abroad now? Or only with foreign academic organizations?

EK: I think that since the Moscow Center for Gender Studies was closed as a legal entity...

NP: In what year?

EK: Two years ago.

NP: In 2014.

EK: I clearly remember that date... You know, the laboratory (in its current form) mostly supports research projects. And the movement component, it... is exists only through the personal participation of individuals in separate initiatives. For instance, I participate in a number of initiatives, but I am participating as an individual. And not as...

NP: You don't represent MCGS.

EK: MCGS was a public organization; it wasn't a laboratory.

NP: The laboratory is a research organization.

EK: For example, now the laboratory is working on research projects and organizing research conferences, but at the scale that we used to work—projects for 500 or 200 people—the laboratory is not involved in those kinds of projects anymore.

NP: But what about the Academic Council on Issues of Gender Equality? Does it follow the MCGS and the Laboratory's policies? When was it created?

EK: The Council was created... Let me recall... Yes, at that time we were closing the Institute of Social and Gender Policy; I think it was in 2006 or 2008. And the Council was created by Natal'ia Mikhailovna Rimashevskaja. And at the time when you had this retrograde...

NLR: Who is on the Council? Only economists?

EK: The Council included active scholars from the various institutes, which were at that time associated with the Moscow Center for Gender Studies. I think Olga Voronina and Natalia Mikhailovna came up with the composition of the Council. For various reasons, because of the closure of the Moscow Center for Gender Studies, the Council is in a very precarious position; it only provides information to the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences about its operations and about those public events that come to public attention. . One of the Council members provides information, it gets included; and thus archived. The Presidium of the Academy of Sciences has about 20 such councils. It's important. Our discourse stays alive, the word "gender" is present... We're living through a time of political and legal assaults on independent gender centers; many of them are now closed. Two of them are being charged as agents... of foreign...

NP: "Foreign agents."

EK: "Foreign agents." I mean, first of all, the Center for Social and Gender Policy in Saratov.

NP: In Petersburg.

EK: And that... And Olga Shnyrova's Ivanovo Center for Gender Research.

NP: But they didn't close it...

EK: But there were...

NP: Attempts.

EK: Yes, there were attempts.

NP: And Cherevatenko, probably, already...?

EK: Her organization wasn't a gender center, it was a public... the Alliance of Women of the Don... I'm talking about the centers that were involved in academic work and developed ideological concepts. Because I distinguish between social initiatives that use [theoretical] concepts and those which foster the development of these values, ideologies, and constructs. I believe, it's very important because in such a way we are maintaining a different meaning for gender. There is a methodology for developing scientific knowledge, which is based in gender methodology. It is, we'll say, objective; it doesn't depend on who financed the work, the reason for the financing, and even the political

implications that might arise in connection with that study. Because there's still some objective knowledge; and under that paradigm, if two times two is four, and, if someone wants Euclidean geometry or algebra to be recognized as limited, we are fine with that. Feel free to develop non-Euclidean geometry, develop your own geometry, but you must always understand what within this framework, within this academic concept and methodology, two times two is four.

NP: My last question is about how you see our future prospects. Can we rely on... well, the old times won't return—that's impossible—but at least, are there any prospects for further gender education, for academic and educational projects in our country, for future collaborative projects with other countries on these themes?

EK: Natal'ia Mikhailova Rimashevskaja—I don't know if you interviewed her—way back in 1967 she worked on her first study...

NP: I'm interested in the future.

EK: This is a person who has conducted research for 50 years and writes. She is a social economist, and she always says that social policy has a cycle to it. Of about 20 years. That's one generation. When she was discussing with me the subject of my dissertation, I said, "Natalia Mikhailovna, who would need it: a gendered model of social policy in a single country (it was in 2008, a period of backsliding, very conservative), who would need it?" And she told me, "Listen, there are peaks and troughs, and we'll soon emerge from this trough, and you will be needed!" In my view, a growth phase is now just beginning, specifically for gender equality policies. Because there is now a demand for discussions about social equality policies, and it's because polarization and inequality have now reached such an extent that they are posing a threat to national security. Accordingly, now we have to have—as psychologists are fond of saying—when a person is drowning, they sink down, down, down, and “when you get to the bottom, you'll have something to push off of.” It seems to me that we have now reached the bottom from which we push. For example, the latest report, which was prepared under the auspices of the Federation Council on the Status of Women, was brilliant. Just a brilliant report. I think Valentina Ivanovna Matvienko is now beginning that new stage and new proposals are being prepared. I imagine that international women's projects will now be supported as one of the formats of accessible diplomacy. People's diplomacy.

NP: Elena Victorovna, thank you so much for your interview and for the positive outlook that you presented! Goodbye.