

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

RUSSIA

Natal'ia L'vovna Pushkareva

**Interviewed by Rebecca Friedman
Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA**

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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 Women's and Gender Studies Department at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology at the Russian Academy of Sciences. At the time of this interview, Pushkareva served as the President of the Russian Association for Research in Women's History [RARWH] and is a Member of the Board of the International Federation for Research in Women's History. Her research interests include gender history, the history of family relations, social anthropology, and the history of sexuality in medieval, modern and contemporary Russia. Pushkareva was twice on a short-list to be selected as a member of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Historical Department, 2006 and 2008). 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. She also serves on several editorial boards. Pushkareva is considered to be a principal founder of the field of women's studies in Russia and served as a collaborator for the Russia portion of the Global Feminisms Project, conducting the majority of the interviews.

Rebecca Friedman is Associate Professor of History at Florida International University, with a focus on modern Russian cultural and gender history. She is currently completing a monograph entitled *Time at Home* that highlights Russia's changing relationship to modernity, temporality, and domesticity in the first several decades of the twentieth century. She is the author of *Masculinity, Autocracy and the Russian University, 1804-1863* (2006) and co-editor of two collections (*Russian Masculinities in History and Culture*, 2003 and *European Identity and Culture: Narratives of Transnational Belonging*, 2012). **Friedman has participated in multiple interdisciplinary programs and served in numerous administrative capacities, including as Director of the European Union Center of Excellence and Director of European and Eurasian Studies. She is the U.S. coordinator of the Russian site of the Global Feminisms Project.**

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.

Key words: family, academia, marriage, history, defining feminism, research, historiography, the West, women's movement, organization, teaching

Rebecca Friedman: Hi, I'm Rebecca Friedman and I am delighted to be here today talking with Natal'ia Pushkareva, a professor, Leading Research Fellow and head of the Women and Gender Studies Department at the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow.¹ Today we are here in Ann Arbor together. This interview is part of the Global Feminisms Project. We are going to spend about 60 minutes or so talking about your life and your work. So, thank you so much for being here today with me.

Natal'ia Pushkareva: Thank you, Rebecca, for inviting me. I will happily answer your questions. Thank you.

RF: Thank you! So, if it's okay with you, I'd like to start at the beginning; I'd love to get a sense of what brought you here today. So, if you could talk about whether there was a moment in your early life, a memory, a person, who influenced you and who got you on your path.

NP: You see, Rebecca, I was born and raised in a family of historians. My parents study Russian history, and so from my childhood I was surrounded by their friends, who were also scholars of history. One of them—in the 70s this was unusual in the Soviet Union—was very knowledgeable about Western historiography. This was Vladimir Terent'evich Pashuto² who wrote books about Alexander Nevsky³ and the politics of Ancient Rus'.⁴ He was my father's friend, and he was the one who suggested to me that I get involved in the study of women. He said, "we already have histories of printing⁵ in Ancient Rus', and histories of the foreign policy of Ancient Rus', and also histories of crafts of Ancient Rus'. Write about the women of Ancient Rus'."

¹ The Russian Academy of Sciences was established in 1724 and is a civil, self-governed, non-governmental organization chartered by the Government of Russia, headquartered in Moscow. The Academy consists of the national academy of Russia, a network of scientific research institutes, and additional social units. (In Russian: About Us, The Russian Academy of Sciences, <http://www.ras.ru/about.aspx>, accessed August 2017).

²Vladimir Terent'evich Pashuto (April 19, 1918 – June 10, 1983) was a Russian Marxist historian who specialized in the history of medieval Lithuania and Russia, especially in their foreign policies. (*Vladimir Pashuto*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Pashuto, accessed October 2019)

³ Saint Alexander Nevsky served as a prince during Kievan Rus' history (see Footnote 3), becoming a legend because of his military victories. He was canonized as a saint of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1547. (In Russian: Holy Prince Alexander Nevsky, <http://www.abc-people.com/data/nevskiy/dat13.htm>, accessed August 2017).

⁴ Ancient Rus' culture can be split into different historical periods of the Middle Ages, one being the Kievan period. Kievan Rus' (882-1240) was a loose federation of East Slavic tribes in Europe. They traded and communicated with the Byzantine Empire, adopting Christianity in 989. The modern people of Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia claim Kievan Rus' as their cultural ancestors. The state fell to the Mongol invasion of the 1240s, declining due to a range of political and economic factors. (Kievan Rus, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Kievan-Rus>, accessed August 2017).

⁵ A history of typography traces the art and techniques of arranging letters to make written language possible.

I was still a schoolgirl at the time. It was in the mid-1970s. I was very attracted to this subject, but when I matriculated to the History Department of Moscow State University and wanted to work on this topic, for a long time no one wanted to take me on as a student. They said, "there's no such subject as women's history, you just made it up." Of course, Marxism was the dominant paradigm at that time.⁶ And, according to the Marxist view, all of the pre-socialist past was a time of universal historic subjugation of women. Women played secondary roles in society, and it was not worthwhile to study their history. It took a tremendous amount of effort, from me and also later from others who believed in it, for the subject of women to gain recognition in Russian historiography.

So I began as an expert on the history of women of the Russian Middle Ages. And later my interests started to expand further chronologically. At first it was Ancient Rus', then later – the early modern period,⁷ the modern period,⁸ and then the time of Peter the Great.⁹ And that's how I arrived at the topic of the history of the birth of the women's movement in Russia.

And here I first noticed that in Russia we study all kinds of social movements. The labor movement is widely accepted.

RF: Of course.

NP: The history of peasant wars and the peasant movement is also well covered. Even religious movements have been presented in historiography fairly well. Only women were missing. There were no women, no women's organizations, and no women's movement. No

⁶ Marxism is a socioeconomic analysis of class relations and historical development that encompasses the political and economic theories of Marx and Engels. These theories were later developed by followers to create communism. In the Soviet Union, Marxism and subsequently Marxism-Leninism became a dogmatic ideology rather than a flexible set of analytical tools used by historians. (McLellan, David T., and Henri Chamber. "Marxism." Encyclopædia Britannica. January 02, 2018. Accessed March 01, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Marxism>.)

⁷ The early modern period loosely refers to the late Middle Ages (1500) until the Age of Revolutions (1800). ("Early modern Europe." Wikipedia. February 28, 2018. Accessed March 02, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_modern_Europe)

⁸ The modern period starting in the mid-18th century, covers events such as the French and American Revolutions and the Industrial Revolution. ("Modern history." Wikipedia. February 17, 2018. Accessed March 02, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_history#Late_modern_period.)

⁹ Peter I (the Great) ruled from 1682 to 1725. His rule is noted for his official transformation of Russia into an empire in 1721 And his reforms, which brought European cultural mores and Enlightenment thought to Russia. (Peter the Great, <https://www.biography.com/people/peter-the-great-9542228>).

one had studied what was happening with our women before the October Revolution¹⁰ because, according to Marxist theory, the revolution of 1917 had given women all their rights, including the right to vote and the right to be elected. That's how I came face-to-face with research on women. And this subject has followed me throughout my academic career and my life in general.

It would be fair to say that I have introduced the women of Ancient Rus' and women who lived later to many people in the world. And these women, my women of the Ancient Rus', have shown me the whole world. Because I fell in love with this subject, and, as a result, I began to participate in international conferences and met many of my colleagues, including those in the US.

RF: Very interesting. And as you began to study women of medieval Russia and early Russia, did you find colleagues in Russia with whom you could work? Did you find other people studying these things?

NP: I'll tell you right away that when I started researching this subject, no one joined me in my research on the women of Ancient Rus' and the early modern period. But there's more. Thirty-five years have passed since I began studying this subject. From then till now, no one else has researched it. Possibly, it is already considered to be well-researched. That's why those who are entering into academic circles now also try to take on later periods. Usually the 18th century is more popular, and everything that has to do with women of the 18th century. We did not have our women's movement at that time. And the 20th century, the 1920's, the period of the so-called solution to the question of women's rights or the 1930's.¹¹ And, in general, the Soviet period is well represented in the historiography. But the earlier period is not there; still no women's history of that period.

RF: And, would you say, given that for so long you worked by yourself on this subject – right, it was just you? Did that impact, did that influence your ability to be successful in the university? You are a very successful academic now. But, if you were working alone for so many decades, what was the impact?

¹⁰ The October Revolution (aka the Bolshevik Revolution) was a revolution that took place in Petrograd on the 25th October of 1917, led by the Bolsheviks (a faction of the Marxist Russian Social Democratic Labour Party). It was a catalyst for the larger Russian Revolution of 1917, which ultimately dismantled the Tsarist autocracy and created the Soviet Union. (Russian Revolution, <http://www.history.com/topics/russian-revolution>, accessed August 2017).

¹¹ Following the Russian Revolution, many advances made in women's rights: The Family Code of 1918 gave women equal status to men, granted illegitimate children the same legal rights as legitimate one and secularized marriage. Divorce became easily obtainable, abortion was legalized in 1920, and communal facilities for childcare and domestic tasks were introduced with the aim of relieving women of household chores. (McElvanny, Katie, *Women and the Russian Revolution*, <https://www.bl.uk/russian-revolution/articles/women-and-the-russian-revolution>, accessed October 2019)

NP: Rebecca, the first thing I'd tell you is that it was very difficult. Because the subject was not accepted. I was not given permission to defend my dissertation. They would say, "there is no such subject as "simply a woman and her social position. You might do the position of a peasant woman or an artisan woman."

RF: Right...

NP: "Maybe women as members of the labor force." Because at that time we were prohibited from studying so-called ruling classes.¹² No one wanted to be my thesis advisor.

RF: Really?

NP: No one wanted to take on this subject. And only one archaeologist, who is now well-known worldwide because of his research on birch bark documents, which help us understand the lives of ordinary people of Ancient Rus'. His name is Valentin Ianin.¹³ He is now a full member of the Academy of Sciences; in other words, an academician, the highest academic rank. At that time, he was only a Ph.D. and a professor. And he said, "I don't understand anything about women's history and don't know if it exists. But I am ready to support you if you write on this new subject."

RF: That's great.

NP: And it was such a wonderful coincidence that, at the same time, my colleague in America—Eve Levin¹⁴—took up the study of the women of ancient Novgorod.¹⁵ That's why we

¹² The ruling class in Marxist theory is the social class in a society that decides the society's political agenda and owns the means of production. ("Marxian class theory." Wikipedia. February 28, 2018. Accessed March 02, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxian_class_theory.)

¹³ Valentin Ianin is a Russian historian who specializes in medieval Russian law, archaeology, and epigraphy, and sphragistics. (Revolvy, LLC. ""Valentin Yanin" on Revolvy.com." Trivia Quizzes. Accessed March 02, 2018. https://www.revolvy.com/main/index.php?s=Valentin_Yanin.)

¹⁴ Eve Levin (Ph.D. Indiana University, 1983) focuses on the intersection of religion and popular culture in premodern Russia and the Balkans. Her first monograph, *Sex and Society in the World of the Orthodox Slavs (900-1700)* remains the path-breaking book on this subject. (<https://history.ku.edu/eve-levin>, accessed October 2019)

¹⁵ The Novgorod Republic was a medieval East Slavic state from the 12th to 15th century, transforming its governing institutions to be politically independent from Kiev. Novgorod was also the original capital of the Rus' people until 882 (see Footnote 3). It remains of interest to Marxist scholars due to its political system, frequently characterized as a "feudal republic." (Janet Martin, "Kievan Rus: The Final Century," Medieval Russia, print).

met. And since 1980 we have been friends. Now she is also the editor-in-chief of *Russian Review*.¹⁶ And thanks to Eve, I was introduced to Western historiography, to American historiography; I realized that so much had been already done in the U.S. in terms of studying women all over the world, including those in Russia. And Russian Studies are very well-developed. Our meeting definitely had an impact on me and gave direction to my work. And now I think that my friendship with Eve has pretty much defined my academic biography.

RF: That's interesting. Let me ask you, if I may, one more question that's maybe more personal. Given that you came from a family of historians, how did they respond to your choice of topic, your parents?

NP: In fact, it's not so simple to answer your question. My father, who studied the history of Russian culture, [inaudible] source studies. He defended his second dissertation, his doctoral dissertation on the classification of historical sources. In other words, on theoretical source studies. He had supported me from the beginning. He said that this subject is appropriate and interesting. It captivated me, and he saw that. But what is surprising is that my mother, who was and still is a luminary¹⁷ in academia, and has a large body of academic work, she researched and continues to research the beginning of 20th century in Russia, the social and protest movement of that time. However odd it may seem, my mother was apprehensive about this subject because at that time she was concerned that it wouldn't be accepted by the academic community; I wouldn't be allowed to publish my dissertation as a book; and choosing such an unusual subject could ruin my academic career. On the one hand, she supported me because she herself was a person who on her own had created a career in academia and achieved quite a bit. She is also a professor and had a challenging life. She had proven to herself that a woman who was born in a small provincial town can succeed in the capital and become a professor in Moscow. She was inspired by these ideas and definitely wanted me to have a successful career in academia. And, for sure, from my childhood she directed me to have noteworthy achievements in my profession and to be successful in my profession and in academia.

I was not at all brought up in the spirit of a traditional education for girls – when people say it's important to have a good husband who understands you; that it is important to behave as a woman, to be a mother. This direction was completely absent in my upbringing. But what was always there was: “you have to succeed on your own, you have to rely upon your own efforts, resources, etc.” And my parents, in general, achieved their goal in my upbringing. Because I graduated from high school with a medal for academic excellence and graduated from university with a red diploma (meaning I had no B's). I immediately received my recommendation for graduate school and the same question resurfaced: what subject

¹⁶ *The Russian Review* is a major academic journal of Russian studies. ("The Russian Review." *The Russian Review*. Accessed March 02, 2018. <http://www.russianreview.org/>.)

¹⁷ A luminary is a person who has attained eminence in his or her field or is an inspiration to others. (*luminary*, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/luminary>, accessed October 2019)

should I select for my dissertation defense? And I selected the subject of women again, and, therefore, this subject has followed me throughout my whole life.

RF: Thank you! And over the course of your life in the academy a lot has changed. Right. How is the subject of women and women's studies received now?

NP: After my dissertation defense, I started working at the Academy of Sciences. All of the events have coincided with so-called perestroika,¹⁸ with the destruction and collapse of the Soviet Union and with a sudden upsurge in interest in the subjects that they studied in the West. Among the subjects were the history of feminism, the history of the women's movement, and, generally, everything that had to do with research on women.

I need to say that the institute where I work, from the very beginning, was more accepting of the subject of women than an institute of history. The Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology has traditionally studied everyday life and the family life of various nations. So here the subject of studying women was, in general, well accepted. But what was surprising is that when I returned to the Institute after my dissertation defense, I was told, "this subject can be extracurricular for you. You can study it in your own free time. The Institute needs you to research the history of Russian emigration."

That's why I officially researched the history of emigration and devoted all my free time to my research on women. But still, this subject stayed with me. Despite all my books on other subjects that have nothing to do with women, out of ten books that I have written, ten monographs,¹⁹ eight are about women and their history. Anyhow, this subject remained my stronger passion.

And, by the way, now I've been talking about the 1980s. In the 1990s the concept of gender studies and gender entered our academic discourse. And, at first, schools appeared, summer schools, for the continuing education of historians who were interested in numerous new scholarly paths in academia. Gender studies was one of these areas. I think I first heard about this area of study, a separate area of study, from sociologists. I started to actively participate in the schools that they organized. I was invited as a lecturer who could say something about the history of women. In addition to lecturing, I was also a student at these schools. I listened to what political experts and sociologists were saying; I recognized

¹⁸ Perestroika (Russian for "restructuring") refers to a series of economic and political reforms undertaken by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev during the 1980s until 1991. His perestroika reforms are often pointed to as the primary causes of 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).

¹⁹ A monograph is a detailed written study of a single specialized subject or an aspect of it.

names that were essential to the history of feminism as a political and intellectual movement. As a result, I learned about Simone de Beauvoir,²⁰ Judith Butler,²¹ Helene Cixous.²² All of this, and Betty Friedan,²³ of course. Their works were not translated into Russian at that time.

These books, they completely changed the women who had access to these texts. And, when I was introduced to the works of classical feminism, I understood that I would not be able to study my women in the ways that I had been; I understood that new approaches were needed, not a descriptive or illustrative history of women, but a history of women's political participation, a history of women's struggles and victories. And that's exactly how I see the present-day study of the question of women's rights and the women's movement.

RF: That's very interesting. So, in the 1990s, then, things really were changing.²⁴ Would you say, when you were coming to these revelations after reading these texts, were you then among a community of other women scholars? Was it you alone at that point or were there other women?

NP: Yes, at that time, definitely in the 1990s, there were a few of us. And we would tell each other about some important new book we had found, and we would talk about how it would be good to have a look at it, to read it; where you can get it, in which library.

²⁰ Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) was a French writer, existentialist philosopher, feminism, and social theorist. She is particularly known for her book *The Second Sex* (1949), which details women's oppression. (Simone de Beauvoir, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/beauvoir/>).

²¹ Judith Butler (1956-) is an American philosopher and gender theorist who is best known for her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), in which she contributes to queer theory and develops her theory of gender performativity. She is also an activist, and currently teaches at the University of California, Berkeley. (Judith Butler, <http://vcresearch.berkeley.edu/faculty/judith-butler/>).

²² Helene Cixous (1937-) is a Jewish-Algerian-French writer, professor, and feminist philosopher and rhetorician. She is best known for her feminist poststructuralist article "The Laugh of Medusa" and created the first center for feminist studies in Europe (today's University of Paris VIII). (Helene Cixous, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/cixous-helene>, accessed August 2017).

²³ Betty Friedan (1921-2006) was an American writer, activist, and feminist. She is remembered for the book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) which many scholars note as a catalyst for second wave American feminism. She founded the National Organization for Women and organized the Women's Strike for Equality in 1970. (Betty Friedan, <http://www.history.com/topics/womens-history/betty-friedan>, accessed August 2017).

²⁴ The period of time between the 1980's and early 90's in Russia was characterized by the change in leadership and politics of the country. The Soviet government dissolved in 1991 and Yegor Gaidar, Prime Minister of Russia in 1992, instituted a series of drastic economic reforms that led to hyperinflation and the privatization of state assets. These severe reforms dramatically impacted the lives of many Russians and forced many into poverty. ("Dissolution of the Soviet Union." Wikipedia. February 28, 2018. Accessed March 03, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dissolution_of_the_Soviet_Union)

It's unimaginable to a Westerner, that in Soviet times not all Western books were given freely to any reader in a library. There was a so-called special storage facility, in Russian it is called "*spetskhran*"²⁵, and a person would need to write a request like this, "Please allow me an opportunity to have a look at, let's say, *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir." They would ask you, "Why do you need it? Why did you decide you needed this book?" And I could not simply say that I was interested in what she had written, it was not allowed there. A justification was needed: "I am studying the history of Ancient Rus'. I would like to know what was happening in the middle of the 20th century and what French philosophers wrote about it."

Well, nevertheless, we got these books, we read and talked about them. And a movement to create summer schools for continuing education appeared in Russia at the end of 90s. When these school were in session, we, as instructors, could be like the students there and tell each other about the books we had read. Specifically, we prepared short lecture courses. We asked Western foundations to support us. And Western foundations helped us organize the summer schools. Among them were the Ford Fund, Carnegie Fund, MacArthur Fund and Soros Open Society Fund. Among German foundations were: the Heinrich Böll Fund, the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, the Fredriech Ebert Foundation.

In other words, German foundations and American foundations which offered us assistance said, "You can organize your schools for intellectuals. And we will provide financial support." We organized an essay contest, and 15 to 40 people arrived. When this movement became stronger, it was about 40 people. And we organized these schools in the summer. We were growing because we were listening to each other, to each other's lectures. Lectures were given by women – psychologists, sociologists, linguists who study gender-based linguistics, journalists; I was there as a historian. And we tried to make our knowledge from our areas of expertise in humanities accessible to others from different fields. That's how the intellectual movement appeared, which united—this intellectual movement with branches everywhere—united an increasing number of women all over Russia.

Really, it was a creation of an independent women's movement. In Soviet times women's movements basically did not exist. The Committee of Soviet Women had a monopoly on women's political activity.²⁶ The Committee of Soviet Women was headed by our first fe-

²⁵ Spetskhran were limited access collections and archival reserves in libraries and archives of the Soviet Union, as part of the system of censorship in the Soviet Union. Access to materials from Special Storage was conditional on special permission. Special Storage was for two major types of publications: those deemed "ideologically dangerous" and classified information, the disclosure of which could threaten the economy and defense of the state. (*spetskhran*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spetskhran>, accessed October 2019)

²⁶ The Committee of Soviet Women, founded in 1941, is a social organization of Soviet women and is still active today as a member of the Women's International Democratic Federation. (Committee of Soviet Women, <http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Committee+of+Soviet+Women>, accessed August 2017).

male cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova, and the Committee of Soviet Women was an absolute puppet in the hands of the authorities.²⁷ They discussed only those issues, the discussion of which was permitted. Beginning in 1991, the first women's groups had appeared. Initially, they were small experimental groups, and many were in universities. What's more is that they were not in the capital cities of Moscow or St. Petersburg...

RF: Ah, OK.

NP: And there were small groups in provincial universities, groups of people interested in studying this subject. They were the ones who had submitted essays and requested to participate in summer schools; they came to see us and we grew alongside them, I would say. They were almost the same age as we were, or a little younger. So it was a whole generation of women who developed this subject, including bringing the subjects of the women's political movement and the women's movement to academic discourse; and through academia they brought this into public debate, to newspapers, to talk shows. The term "feminism" had a negative connotation, a connotation of something alien imposed by the West – and thus, very dangerous. That bad image, unfortunately, has stayed. But it was questioned for a moment in the 1990s because the attitude toward feminism was changing. And the feminist movement began to be treated with more understanding.²⁸ And at that time there was a desire to treat feminism as non-uniform, that there were many feminisms. I support

²⁷ Valentina Tereshkova was the first woman to go into space in 1963. She later became a deputy in the Supreme Soviet, people's Soviet, and leader of the Committee of Soviet Women (Editor, Tim Sharp Reference. "Valentina Tereshkova: First Woman in Space." Space.com. Accessed March 03, 2018. <https://www.space.com/21571-valentina-tereshkova.html>.)

²⁸ The term "feminism" was rarely used in Russia before the 90's because of the negative connotations associated with the term. A feminist was believed to be a woman who was a part of the "proletariat" and did not care for her household, only her individual career. ("Democratization and Gender in Contemporary Russia." Google Books. Accessed March 03, 2018.)

precisely this idea. There are a wide variety of feminisms: Marxist²⁹, liberal³⁰, radical³¹, psychoanalytic.³² But, in order to say that I am a feminist or that I don't accept these feminist ideals, I would need to know about all of them.

RF: Of course.

NP: As a result, if we receive this knowledge, we should disseminate it. And that's our mission.

RF: So, to make sure I understand properly. The women who participated in these summer schools, in the provinces and in the centers, would they have considered themselves feminists? Or you're saying, each one might have, might have not, it depended on that particular person?

NP: We never used the term "feminism" or "feminist" in the names of our schools. And, in general, there hasn't been a consensus as to whether we should emphasize at all times our affiliation with feminism. Some say it might be better to have a broader perspective and say that we belong to a women's movement. I would like to emphasize again my centrist position: I believe that all voices need to be heard. Including those who openly say, "I am not and will never be a feminist." I am simply reflecting on my own life.

RF: Aha...

NP: Because in my initial interviews that I gave to my Russian colleagues, I was asked the question directly, "are you a feminist?" And I responded, "Are you kidding me? Of course I'm not! In no shape or form! What gave you that idea?" However, years have passed, and my decision now has to do with my personal experience and with difficulties I've faced in my journey. Now I can say this openly: events in my life have led me to consider myself a feminist.

²⁹ Marxist feminism is feminism focused on investigating and explaining the ways in which women are oppressed through systems of capitalism and private property. (*Marxist feminism*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxist_feminism, accessed October 2019)

³⁰ Liberal feminism is an individualistic form of feminist theory, that focuses on women's ability to maintain their equality through their own actions and choices. (*Liberal feminism*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal_feminism, accessed October 2019)

³¹ Radical feminism is a perspective within feminism that calls for a radical reordering of society in which male supremacy is eliminated in all social and economic contexts. (*Radical feminism*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radical_feminism, accessed October 2019)

³² Psychoanalytic feminism is a theory of oppression, that asserts that men have an inherent psychological need to subjugate women. (Wolff, Kristina, *Psychoanalytic Feminism*, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosp115>, accessed October 2019)

That decision had to do with this: I was married for 17 years and both of us were faculty at the University of the Academy of Sciences. Later, we studied in the same cohort. However, when we were students in the same cohort, myself and him, we were equally excellent students, we did not have any B's, only A's. But, a so-called premium stipend, in other words, a stipend that was twice as much as the normal amount, was given to him because he was a boy.³³ They simply said: "he's a boy." And that's why he received a premium stipend and I did not. When we were applying to graduate school, they said "well, Natal'ia's parents are historians and they'll set her up somewhere." And the only spot in graduate school was given to him. All that time it did not even seem strange to me. I even believed that it was right. At that time I believed that it was right. But when we got married—earlier we were just friends from the same program—when we got married, when our child was born, when I realized that all the responsibilities for childrearing and child raising were mine, none were his.... Because he said to me then, "you're probably more talented than me because you can keep up with everything, but I can't. I need time for that." I had to grit my teeth, but I truly was able to keep up and still did not think of myself as a feminist. However, the next day after my doctorate dissertation defense (and in our country it was considered early, at the age of 36, for a second dissertation), the next day after my defense, he filed for a divorce. And when I asked him questions, "what's wrong? Why?" I was bursting into tears, "why are you leaving and so on." And he responded, "I don't want to be Margaret Thatcher's husband."³⁴

RF: Wow...

NP: In those times, Margaret Thatcher was a very significant political figure.

RF: Yes, I understand.

NP: Now, possibly, young people may not be aware, it would be like Angela Merkel,³⁵ or someone like her.

RF: Exactly!

³³ A stipend is a regular fixed sum of money paid for services or to defray expenses, such as for scholarship, internship, or apprenticeship. (*Stipend*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stipend>, accessed October 2019)

³⁴ Margaret Thatcher (1925-2013) was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1979-1990 and Leader of the Conservative Party from 1975-1990. She was the first woman to hold that office, and her policies have become known as Thatcherism. Her style of leadership gave her the nickname "Iron Lady." During her time in office, she reduced the influence of trade unions, privatized certain industries, scaled back public benefits and changed the terms of political debate, much like her friend and ideological ally, U.S. President Ronald Reagan. (Margaret Thatcher, <https://www.history.com/topics/british-history/margaret-thatcher> accessed August 2017).

³⁵ Angela Merkel (1954-) is a German politician who has been the Chancellor of Germany since 2005 as well as the leader of the Christian Democratic Union since 2000. She has served as President of the European Council and leader of the G7. (Angela Merkel, <https://www.biography.com/people/angela-merkel-9406424>, accessed August 2017).

NP: During those times, she was quite well known, and we truly did not know much about her husband; however, we knew very well who she was. And he said, "I don't want to be Margaret Thatcher's husband." He left me and married the secretary of our department. And she... first of all, she was fifteen years younger than him. Second of all, she immediately promised that she would never have a career in academia, she would never write a dissertation; she would not, so to say, compete with him, be his rival. They have two children. They have a typical traditional family. But he, when he left me, kind of made a statement about "who's king of the jungle?"³⁶ We have this expression in Russian. In other words, who is the house master here? You can be on your own. My son was 14 at that time, and when he saw what was happening, he said, "mom, I'm going to be a feminist."

As it goes, from the time that my husband left me and everything else that happened, I completely changed my views. And then when I was asked about my feminist views and things like that, I said, "yes, I want to protect those who are in the same shoes as me. I want them to feel better. I want them to feel more confident. I want to find the right words that will help other women like me set up their lives and be happy in their lives." That's why for me feminism is an opportunity to have a choice and an opportunity to validate the path that I have chosen. I think that by studying my subject I help these women; and, generally, as much as possible increase our overall self-consciousness as women. I think that's the grand objective of academic research, of the studies that I am involved in.

RF: Thank you and I am sure you do succeed at that. Absolutely, absolutely.

NP: Fortunately.

RF: Right. Now, in your position, do you have students who you are able to share your interests with? And are you a mentor to younger scholars interested in these themes?

NP: Now that I've studied this subject for over 30 years, I would definitely say that I have those to whom I can pass on my work and what I do. The creation of the Russian Association of Researchers of Women's History (RARWH) was a huge breakthrough here.³⁷ In other words, an organization which has united those who initially were students at the summer schools on women's and gender studies. Furthermore, in the early 2000s, I convinced myself that, although I don't like administrative work, I would have to do it. An en-

³⁶ This Russian expression literally translates in English to "who is the keeper of the forest."

³⁷ The Russian Association of Researchers of Women's History was established in 2008 as part of the Russian Committee of the International Federation of Research in Women's History. It encourages the development of women researches and seeks to establish forums for exchange of ideas among scholars. (Muravyeva, Marianna, and Natalia Novikova. *Womens History in Russia (Re)Establishing the Field*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2014.)

tity independent from government, from the Academy of Sciences, non-governmental organization, non-profit organization that would unite researchers, teachers that are involved in research on women who are ready to disseminate this knowledge further. That's why just like in the summer schools which I helped to organize, our main goal was, first and foremost, to invite teachers.

RF: Yes...

NP: So that after attending our courses, they would continue to share this knowledge at their universities. And we tried to get people to represent our country from all over. Not from the same universities time and time again, but visitors from new cities every time.

RF: Of course...

NP: That's why at the Russian Association of Researchers of Women's History (RARWH), of which I am now the head, over 50 cities and over 50 universities are represented. In this way, institutes are also represented. There are many people of different ages, over 400 now. It's a big all-Russian organization and interregional social association. We hold our conferences every year. And each time in a different city. It's our approach. What is it for? To introduce our work to different parts of the country. It's a huge country.

RF: Of course!

NP: Transportation and airfares are definitely very expensive. For that reason, until now, before the complications between Russia and Western countries, we received assistance from Western foundations.

RH: Of course!

NP: We received assistance from Western foundations such as the Global Fund for Women, and German foundations such as the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (for understandable reasons), New Synagogue - from Berlin, American Association of Women in Slavic Studies. In other words, various organization participated, if only a little. They helped in publishing theses, let's say, or they gave us funds to pay for younger scholar's transportation, because, first and foremost, we invite graduate students and the youth.

RF: Of course!

NP: Yes. And so, in regards to your question, do the schools still exist now? Yes, they do. I have people to whom I can pass the leadership of the Russian Association of Researchers of Women's History so that it will continue to exist in the future. I hope that if I step down from the administrative work, people will be there to carry it on and to start new projects. I think what's most important here is that this subject is still ever-present in academic discourse, and dissertations are defended as before. Newer and newer perspectives appear now that could not have been posed before. Lately one of the most important subjects is the

human body and health: women's bodies, women's health, reproductive behavior, and everything that relates to the history of medicine, the history of midwifery or obstetrics and so on. Unlike in Western historiography, we don't have any research on this subject. It's new for us; for us, it's an interdisciplinary area, which is, on the one hand, academic, and, on the other hand, provides practical solutions on issues that currently concern Russian society. And for this reason, we collaborate closely both with organizations for women that provide psychological counseling and with organizations that fight against abuse and domestic violence. All of these are new subjects; they came to us from Western historiography. But thanks to the contacts that we developed in the years before we had sanctions against Russia or other things, we continue to actively collaborate and launch new projects.³⁸

RF: And especially given the nature of those themes, health and the reproduction, is there a relationship, would you say, between what goes on in schools and universities and other areas of women's lives? Is there a kind of activism for women outside of the academy, outside of the schools with which you work?

NP: It's a complicated question, it has to do with this. The fact of the matter is that activism, as it is understood in the West, is currently discouraged by the state. Our representatives think it's okay to help women. But only in a way approved by the state. That's why women's organizations exist that are initiated from above. They also make a contribution to the study of the subject of women in the broadest sense of the term. And to a certain extent they collect information that can be used as a basis for researchers, sociologists, ethnologists, social anthropologists, and so on. When it comes to a theoretical understanding of the issue, it happens, of course, only within the academy. What's important for me here is the question of interaction between scholars of the academy and women's organizations outside of the academy. Because I am of the opinion that many Russian scholars who think of themselves as feminists are hiding away in the ivory tower.³⁹ They think of themselves as great theoreticians, advanced thinkers, and intellectuals.

RF: Yes.

NP: That often they do not know how to talk to ordinary people. They can't make their knowledge accessible to those for whom they are studying women's history and the women's movement. I am referring again to my own experience: when I was at one organized event, not quite a school or a conference, but what would be called in the West a "workshop." For day-care teachers who work at educational pre-school facilities north of the po-

³⁸ Following Russia's illegal annexation of Ukraine, the US along with European countries imposed economic sanctions on Russia. These sanctions have hindered the Russian economy as well as worsening relations between Russia and western countries. (Wang, Wan, *Impact of Western Sanctions on Russia in the Ukraine Crisis*, <http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/jpl/article/view/45567>, accessed October 2019)

³⁹ "The ivory tower" is an expression that originates in the Biblical *Song of Solomon*, and since the 19th century has been used to describe academic environments and intellectual goals that are disconnected with the practical concerns of everyday life. (Definition, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ivory%20tower>, accessed August 2017).

lar circle. In other words, in the Russian North. Somewhere north of Archangelsk and Murmansk, in the most northern part of Russia. And we arrived there; we wanted to tell them about approaches in education and, in general, gender-based education of children and other things.

RF: Aha.

NP: And they told me, “Natal’ia L’vovna, you would need to speak with female kindergarten teachers and explain to them why they need to raise boys and girls differently; why they need to read books to them in a particular way; what would they need to pay attention to in order to avoid gender stereotypes.” And, my God, I understood that I would not be able to talk about things like “gender display”⁴⁰ or “bifurcations of consciousness.”⁴¹ And I would have to explain in simple words why our children need it.

RF: Aha. I see...

NP: And I went to a bookstore there, in Murmansk and bought children's books with pictures. And I showed them, look what it says [inaudible] sentence that our children are reading. “Mom was washing a window frame.” Why it is that the mom, and not dad, is washing windows? Why doesn’t dad wash windows? Why is that kind of stereotype formed, how did this stereotype come about, that a woman should do all of the house work? Why in children's books do we see pictures of a dad who is sitting at a table reading a newspaper and waiting? And mom at that time is wearing slippers and a house robe, she is cooking and serving him something. So yes, we read children's books together with them. And the conclusion we came to was: we, representatives of intellectual society, we need to think all the time about how to take our knowledge outside the bounds of the academy and make it accessible to ordinary people.

RF: Exactly!

NP: I think, that's the objective for those who have spent many years researching women.

RF: It’s really interesting. And I think, the same thing could happen all over the world, exactly these kinds of conversations.

NP: It seems to me so, yes, that if stereotypes... Yes, yes...

⁴⁰ “Gender display” is the process whereby we perform the roles expected of us by social convention. (Morris and Warren, *The Codes of Gender*, <https://www.mediaed.org/discussion-guides/The-Codes-of-Gender.pdf>, accessed October 2019)

⁴¹ “Bifurcations of consciousness” is a theory explained by Dorothy Smith that relates to the two modes that exist within a woman: the world that one experiences versus the view to which one must adapt. (Bifurcation of Consciousness, <https://rampages.us/oliviapryor/tag/bifurcation-of-consciousness/>, accessed August 2017).

RF: Which brings me to another question, if I may? Would you say now, given where you are in your life and in your career, do you feel part of a global network of feminists, of scholars? Do you see yourself and your colleagues in Moscow as part of a global network?

NP: Unquestionably, both myself and others with whom I started these schools of women's and gender research. I hope that they can also be represented in your project precisely because of the fact that they can talk about how within their studies, within their chosen field, their understanding of feminism has developed and about their roles in the modern women's movement. That's why I and they definitely feel like we belong to a world women's movement. Because I think that our organization, the Russian Association of Researchers of Women's History... it's definitely a part of the International Federation of Researchers in Women's History that meets every 5 years with the Congress of Historical Studies.⁴²

RF: Ah, OK...

NP: That's why I have been a part of that federation since 1989, since it was founded. We didn't have our own organization then, but I was like an observer, yes... So I saw how it was created. All of this was happening in front of my eyes. Initially, it had 25 countries and now - over 100.

RF: Wow...

NP: That's why the interest in women's history is increasing and we are definitely a part of this intellectual milieu⁴³, aren't we? On the other hand, as a representative of the All-Russian Council for the Consolidation of Women's Movement (there is this all-Russian association of women's organizations), I belong to it precisely because I lead a non-profit association for women.⁴⁴ And, consequently, as a member of the Council for the Consolidation of Women's Movement, I believe I am a part of the women's movement in Russia. And, consequently, also a part of worldwide women's movement through the Council.

RF: OK.

NP: And as a chair of the expert council.

⁴² Most likely referring to the International Committee of Historical Sciences, an association of scholarship comprised of a number of international and national organizations committed to research in historical study. ("International Committee of Historical Sciences." Wikipedia. February 23, 2018. Accessed March 03, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Committee_of_Historical_Sciences.)

⁴³ The physical or social setting in which something occurs or develops. (*Milieu*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/milieu>, accessed October 2019)

⁴⁴ The Council for the Consolidation of Women's Movement was created to unify the activities of women's organizations and build a network of community support. (Sperling, Valerie. *Sex, politics, and Putin: political legitimacy in Russia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.)

RF: So it seems like you've managed success on many levels: internationally, nationally, and personally, as well.

NP: You could say that.

RF: At this point I'd ask if there is anything else that you would like to add to our conversation. Anything, I have not asked you that you might like to share with us, with me.

NP: What would I like to add to this? Probably, first and foremost, I want to express my hope that our intellectual efforts, our joint intellectual efforts will be supported by future generations.

RF: Yes.

NP: I really would like to think so.

RF: Yes.

NP: I would like to believe that our efforts have not been in vain and that we will be understood by those who follow us. Unfortunately, I see in many countries a peculiar conservative change. Again we an interest in being like everyone else. A desire to be, let's call it feminine, and not to do masculine work, not to be involved in masculine professions, not to share the values of previous generations, so to say. And I see an ironic distancing on the part of young women from feminism, from the movements, the rallies, the efforts that women demonstrated before us over the span of the 20th century in many countries. I would like for feminism in our country to not be such a slanderous term. I want it to be a normal term, I want others to understand that feminism is not simply a struggle of women for their rights. It is a struggle of women for the right to choose their own path. Not to depend on traditions, on the pressures of the environment, but to be themselves and to love themselves. That's why I often write to my students when they say that they talk about how tired they are and they do not have energy for something. I always say, "you are the only 'you' you have," I say, "you have to be strong in order to feel happy." And I would, of course, like to wish happiness to all of us and all of them.

RF: Thank you! Thank you so much!

NP: Thank you!