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Andrei A. Ilin, Ksenia M. Belik

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PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF
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1990S RUSSIA**

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Andrei A. Ilin¹, Ksenia M. Belik²

THE ADVENT OF GRANTS: PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF GRANT-BASED FUNDING IN THE 1990S RUSSIA³

Grant-based funding became one of the crucial innovations in the Russian academia of the 1990s. It has been studied from quantitative and institutional perspectives while our paper focuses primarily on oral histories of grants that shed light on their subjective meaning. Interviews show that some Russian academics remember their first experiences of applying for various programs, competition and peer review as important part of their ego-narratives. These narratives portray ambitious, independent, and free-minded scholarly persona that chimes with the virtues promoted in the academic community back in the 1990s, when research grants and scholarships were introduced. Apart of their practical benefits and prestige, grants helped some scientists and scholars to comprehend themselves and the changing landscape of post-Soviet academia.

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Keywords: oral history, grants, history of post-soviet universities, history of post-soviet academia, history of the 90-s, academic persona.

¹ National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia). Poletayev Institute for Theoretical and Historical Studies in the Humanities. Senior research fellow; Email: aailin@hse.ru

² National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia). Poletayev Institute for Theoretical and Historical Studies in the Humanities. Research Assistant; Email: kbelik@hse.ru

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1. Introduction

Studies of the changes the 1990s saw in Russian academia are quite numerous, and the evolution of the grant system is no exception.⁴ Most, if not all, of these articles and books, however, deal with quantitative changes and institutional transformations concerning research and education. Important as they are, these angles are, of course, far from being the only ones possible. The evolution of research grant system in the Russian context can also be viewed through the prism of scholars' subjective experience and ego-narratives.⁵ The history of the transformation of science in Russia would be incomplete without the personal histories of scholars for whom research grants have been closely related to their academic personae, i.e. their social role and identity, associated with certain personal traits.⁶ Getting a grant largely depended on the virtues and efforts of the applicants themselves, and the life events it made possible – e.g. one's first trip abroad or meeting new colleagues – remained important episodes in their subsequent ego-narratives describing them as persons. These life events were not just about changing one's position in what Bourdieu called the academic field. They also had some subjective meaning which seems to have gone beyond the struggle for symbolic capital.⁷ This, however, does not mean that institutional history would be inapplicable here. On the contrary, it could and should be employed, as it provides the material and backdrop for remembrance and self-contemplation in the context of changes taking place in academia.

This article draws on a wide range of sources, the most important of which are interviews collected for the archives of the Center for University Studies at the Poletayev Institute for Theoretical and Historical Studies in the Humanities, Higher School of Economics (Moscow).⁸ In an effort to reveal the personal dimension of academic life in the 1990s using the prism of memories, this study does not claim to be representative, nor even to be mapping *all* possible attitudes and opinions of scholars. Interviews based on which this study was conducted were selected from the archive

⁴ Loren Graham and Irina Dezhina, *Science In The New Russia: Crisis, Aid, Reform*. (Bloomington Indiana University Press, 2008): 45-66; Ina Ganguli, "Saving Soviet Science: The Impact of Grants When Government R&D Funding Disappears," *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 9, no. 2 (2017): 165-201; Ekaterina Streltsova, "Research Grants in Russian Science: Evidences of an Empirical Study", *Higher School of Economics Research Paper No. WP BRP 70/STI/2016* (2017); Larisa Kozlova, "Izmenenie Struktury Finansovykh Investitsii I Lichnykh Dokhodov V Rossiiskikh Sotsial'nykh I Gumanitarnykh Naukakh, 1990 – Nachalo 2000-kh godov," in *Sotsial'nye Nauki V Postsovetskoi Rossii* (Moscow, Akademicheskii proekt, 2005), 355-363; Gennadii Batygin, "Nevidimaia Granitsa: Grantovaia Podderzhka I Restrukturirovanie Nauchnogo Soobshchestva V Rossii," in *Sotsial'nye Nauki V Postsovetskoi Rossii* (Moscow, Akademicheskii proekt, 2005), 323-340.

⁵ On biographies and ego-narratives in science see: Michael Shortland and Richard Yeo, *Telling Lives In Science: Essays On Scientific Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Mott Greene, "Writing Scientific Biography," *Journal of the History of Biology* 40, no. 4 (2007): 727-59.

⁶ Lorraine Daston and Otto Sibum, "Introduction: Scientific Personae and Their Histories," *Science in Context* 16, no. 2 (2003): 1-8, <https://doi.org/10.1111/hith.10717>. For the further discussion see: Herman Paul, "What Is a Scholarly Person? Ten Theses on Virtues, Skills, and Desires," *History and Theory* 53 (2014): 348-371; Mineke Bosch, "Scholarly Personae and Twentieth-Century Historians: Explorations of a Concept," *BMGN-Low Countries Historical Review* 131, no. 4 (2016): 33-54.

⁷ See: Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988): 73-127; Pilar Mendoza, Aaron M. Kuntz, and Joseph B. Berger, "Bourdieu and Academic Capitalism: Faculty "Habitus" in Materials Science and Engineering," *The Journal of Higher Education*, 83, 4 (2012): 566, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2012.11777257>.

⁸ On the archive see: Zarina Gatina and Dina Grebenkina, "Lichnye Vospominaniia O Postsovetskikh Universitetakh I Arhiv Professorskoj Identichnosti," *Dialog So Vremenem*, no. 51 (2015): 261-286.

collection (which comprises 181 interviews in all) by two criteria: informativeness and thematic proximity. They probably do not provide for a typical or representative picture. We mainly drew upon testimonies by residents of large cities who at one time or another worked at prestigious and well-known Russian scientific institutions. This affiliation allowed them to take advantage of the opportunities that opened in the 1990s.

The range of sources used here was also limited by the requirement for all those interviewed to be scholars who stayed at their universities and thus retained their academic identity. All the difficulties and tribulations they describe in the interviews are seen in the light of their subsequent overcoming and professional achievements, which include staying in academia all through the difficult time in the 1990s. Last but not least, a caveat has to be mentioned that concerns our relationships with many of our informants: we work at the same university and even at the same institute, which imposes certain limitations and increases their possible influence on us. Being aware of this, we deliberately avoided sensitive topics that would go beyond the usual and "official" self-representation of academics. On the one hand, this kind of influence is fairly inevitable since academia is a small world, especially in countries like Russia, and relations between its members never remain purely formal.⁹ On the other hand, being close with one's object of study means better understanding and greater openness, which provides for a better research.¹⁰

2. The (pre)history of grant-based research funding in Russia in the 1990s

In English, any targeted funding can be called a grant.¹¹ In this broad sense, different sorts of grants had existed in Soviet academia as seen from the perspective of English-speaking observers.¹² In the 1990s, the word *grant* emerged in Russian with a largely similar meaning¹³, which usually was more specific in the academic context. Target research funding is only called a grant when provided by an autonomous foundation on a competitive basis with proposals being reviewed by independent experts. In this special sense, it was only in the early 1990s that research grants appeared in Russia,

⁹ See: Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, 1-35.

¹⁰ Esther Newton, "My Best Informant's Dress: The Erotic Equation in Fieldwork," *Cultural Anthropology* 8, no. 1 (1993): 3-23

¹¹ *Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 415.

¹² Loren Graham mentioned soviet "system of contracts and grants", though specifying that it was "weakly developed". Loren Graham, "When Ideology and Controversy Collide: The Case of Soviet Science," *The Hastings Center Report* 12, no. 2 (1982): 29, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3561804>. On soviet students' stipends as "grants" see: John Biggs, "Art And Art Education In The USSR," *Western Perspectives on Soviet Education in the 1980s* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1986): 176-177. See also: Richard Rockingham Gill, "Problems of Decision-Making in Soviet Science Policy," *Minerva* 5, no. 2 (1967): 205.

¹³ For instance, the first legal definition of "grants" appeared in the 1996 Federal law on science. Grants presupposed "free of charge and irrevocable" funding of "particular research [projects]" by citizens and legal entities. Conditions and other details were not specified. Anatolij Berdashkevich, "Ob Utochnenii Ponjatija 'Grant' V Rossijskom Zakonodatel'stve," *Vestnik Rossijskogo Gumanitarnogo Nauchnogo Fonda*, no. 3 (2003): 10.

marking a deliberate departure from (parts of) the old Soviet research financing system. It is partly due to this that grants and the foundations that distributed them were associated with Western modernity and efficiency.¹⁴

Like in many other countries, research grants in Russia were offered by non-governmental or autonomous organizations. One of the first such foundations to operate in the Soviet Union was the Cultural Initiative Foundation (1987–1991) funded by the financier and philanthropist George Soros. In 1992, the International Science Foundation was launched, which was active in Russia until 2001–2003, along with several other Soros organizations.¹⁵

About the same time, other Western foundations came to Russia. By the end of the 1990s, there were already several dozens of them operating in the country.¹⁶ The first Russian organization of this kind was the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR), established in 1992. Its establishment was the result of long efforts by the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences and other scholarly institutions to implement in Russia certain Western schemes of research funding, mainly patterned after the American National Science Foundation. In 1994, the Russian Foundation for Humanities (RFH) was separated from the RFBR, which operated in a similar way.¹⁷

These institutions revolutionized Russian research funding practices. During the Soviet time, for funds to be allocated for a certain research project, rational reasoning and assessment were usually required, but independent expertise was neither possible nor necessary in the light of the unity and centralization of science which were the officially declared academic values in the USSR. All reviews and reports were written within the single system of the Academy of Sciences, government ministries or the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Independence from these authorities was never officially declared, let alone considered to be an advantage. Peer reviewing barely could play a role in an academia that largely relied on hierarchies.¹⁸

Throughout the Soviet time, government budget allocations for research and development were the permanent subject of underhand dealings and under-the-carpet battles fought mostly by senior managers.¹⁹ The vast majority of academics did not participate in funding decision-making.

¹⁴ See: Mihail Alfimov, “Raznymi putjami - k obshhej celi,” *Nezavisimaia Gazeta-Nauka*, no. 2, 1999, 6. “The most important achievement of the RFBR is the creation of a modern, sufficiently formalized and automated system of expertise that accumulates the best experience of foreign scientific foundations. The RFBR doesn’t set any goals for scientists. The Foundation’s task is to awaken scientists’ initiative and select the best of their proposals, guided by one criterion – the quality of work.”

¹⁵ Valerii Soifer, *Intellektual’naia Elita I Filantropiia: Desiat’ Let Sorosovskoi Obrazovatel’noi Programmy* (Moscow: DDF Foundation, 2005).

¹⁶ Russian respondents named 45 institutions both local and international in 2002–2003 survey. Not all of them had offices or official representatives in Russia. Irina Dezhina, “Vliianie Grantovogo Finansirovaniia Na Polozhenie Zhenschin V Rossiiskoi Nauke,” *Sotsiologicheskii Zhurnal*, no. 4 (2003): 92.

¹⁷ See: Graham, Dezhina. Op. cit., 48–55; Aleksandr Bikbov, *Grammatika Poriadka: Istoricheskaia Sotsiologiia Poniatii, Kotorye Meniaiut Nashu Real’nost’* (Moscow: Izdatel’skii dom Vysshei shkoly ekonomiki, 2014): 277–286; Graham, “When Ideology and Controversy Collide: The Case of Soviet Science,” 29.

¹⁸ Graham, Dezhina. Op. cit., 48–55.

¹⁹ See for instance case with the funding of Chernogolovka scientific center during the Thaw: Maria Rogacheva, *The Private World Of Soviet Scientists From Stalin To Gorbachev* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017): 28–48.

They worked for fixed salaries and asked no questions about the source of their relatively high income.²⁰ Their initiative was encouraged, particularly since Khrushchev's thaw, only if it concerned the research work itself.²¹ As to promotion and bonuses, one was supposed not to ask for them but to wait until one was granted them by one's superior. This was a matter of *modesty* – a value and a virtue that was important for many Soviet people.²² Selfishness and competition in the 'bourgeois' sense were not encouraged officially. Even the so-called 'socialist competition' required that employees should give top priority to the collective and the common cause.²³

These attitudes meant that Soviet scholars were wary of Western career techniques and funding instruments that were new to them. For example, in 1989, Sergej Dovlatov, a Soviet writer who had emigrated to the USA in 1978 and got acquainted with the American academic landscape, suggested that his Soviet friend Andrej Arjev should have the Soros Foundation pay his trip to the United States: "Make them pay the ticket and per diem for you." As Arjev hesitated, Dovlatov tried to persuade him that inviting people without paying their travel expenses was "quite common at American universities and not humiliating."²⁴ A year later, David Waxberg, president of the Bay Area Council for Soviet Jews, noticed that scholars who immigrated to the United States from the Soviet Union and found themselves in dire straits often refused to apply for grants because "it seemed demeaning" to them.²⁵

The traditional Soviet 'rules of the game' were more easily violated by overconfident academics and also by those who, on the contrary, allegedly never minded to humiliate themselves for dubious benefits. Later on, in 1994, when the Russian academic community was already more or less familiar with the grant system, a *Literaturnaya Gazeta* journalist who interviewed recipients of Soros Foundation grants asked them: "Didn't you feel embarrassed, didn't you feel like a beggar, pardon my French?"²⁶ Apparently, she implied that asking a foreign institution for money was a wound to the national pride of a Russian and a violation of the Soviet rules of decorum.

But many academics, on the contrary, viewed research grants as bringing new opportunities and liberating them from Soviet-time constraints. Despite the difference in attitudes towards grants, their critics and advocates agreed that this was money received and awarded by persons rather than institutions. It is no coincidence that among the opponents of the new funding model were heads of

²⁰ Ibid, 85, 106-107.

²¹ Paul Josephson, *New Atlantis Revisited* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997): 263.

²² On the soviet concept of *modesty* see: Suvi Salmenniemi, "In Search Of A 'New (Wo)Man': Gender And Sexuality In Contemporary Russian Self-Help Literature," *Russian Mass Media And Changing Values* (London: Routledge, 2011): 143; Yulia Gradszkova, "Women's Everyday Life In Post-Soviet Russia: Collecting Stories, Dealing With Silences And Exploring Nostalgia," *The Soviet Past In The Post-Socialist Present: Methodology And Ethics In Russian, Baltic And Central European Oral History And Memory Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2015): 42.

²³ *Problemy Sotsialisticheskogo Sorevnovaniia Nauchnykh Kollektivov* (Moscow: Vysshiaia shkola, 1982): 90.

²⁴ Sergei Dovlatov, *Zhizn' I Mneniia. Izbrannaia Perepiska* (Saint Petersburg: Zvezda, 2011): 342.

²⁵ Constance Holden, "No American Dream for Soviet Emigres," *Science* 248, no. 4959 (1990): 1069.

²⁶ T. Slavina, "Derzajte, Nyne Obodrenny...", *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, no. 7 (1994): 7.

Russian academic institutions who saw that some of their employees were thus gaining independence from the central funding system that allowed managers to control their subordinates.²⁷

Grants were a novel funding model that concerned not only those directly involved. Because they were associated with and changed the lives of specific persons whose backgrounds, virtues and vices were known to others, grant stories captured the imagination of many people and provoked many responses within and without the academic community. Grants were the subject of a debate in the Russian parliament²⁸, while reflection on the Soros Foundation's operation in Russia was at the center of a sci-fi novel published in 2000.²⁹

3. The Grant and the Self: the Case of Russia

At the early stages of the Russian grant history, having one's proposal granted by a Western foundation was not so difficult since ample funds were available and scholarly considerations were combined with charity ones when decisions were made how this money should be distributed.³⁰ Grants could thus be seen as easy money that didn't but harm the initiative of scholars. In a 1996 survey, 13% of Russian scholars believed that research grants made scroungers out of their fellow academics.³¹

However, the majority of Russian scholars held a different viewpoint. They realized that receiving a grant depended largely on the agency and virtues of applicants and reviewers. Grants were inseparable from what member of the Russian Academy of Sciences Mikhail Alfimov called the "new psychology" of scholars that was characterized by a "pro-activist approach to life."³² As early as January 1992, another leading Soviet scientist, physicist Zhores Alferov, who had been member of the Academy of Sciences since 1979 and member of the CPSU since 1965, stated that following the collapse of the "totalitarian regime" scholars should get accustomed to flexible market conditions and "gain commercial experience," which consisted of attracting grants and venture capital investment.³³ Relying on a new type of academic persona was not just a dream of the leading Russian science managers. Focus group interviews with Russian physicists conducted by Theodore Gerber and

²⁷ Stephen Fortescue, "Soviet Science Under Gorbachev," *Prometheus* 8, no. 2 (1990): 229, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08109029008629474>; Modest Kolerov, "Nauka bez gosudarstva," *Otechestvennye Zapiski*, no. 7 (2002): 156; Andrei Iurevich, *Umnye no bednye: uchenye v sovremennoj Rossii* (Moscow: Izdatel'skij centr nauchnyh i uchebnyh programm, 1998): 55.

²⁸ For the most comprehensive account of the 1995 special hearings see: Valerii Soifer, *Intellektual'naiia Elita I Filantropiia: Desiat' Let Sorosovskoi Obrazovatel'noi Programmy* (Moscow: DDF Foundation, 2005): 248-265.

²⁹ Elena Popova, "Voskhozhdenie Zenty," *Znamia*, no. 4 (2000): 51-109. Parallels to Soros Foundation were drawn in one of the first reviews in 2001. Liubov' Turbina, "Voskhozhdenie K Smyslu," *Druzhiba Narodov*, no. 6 (2001): 215-217.

³⁰ See: George Soros, *Open Society: Reforming Global Capitalism* (New York: Public Affairs, 2000): 244; Leonid Nikitskij, *Trudno delat' dobro (Fond Sorosa: 1987-1997)* (Moscow: Institut "Otkrytoe obshchestvo", 1997): 32-37.

³¹ Aleksandr Allakhverdian, Irina Dezhina, and Andrei Iurevich, "Zarubezhnye Sponsory Rossiiskoi Nauki: Vampiry Ili Santa-Klausy?," *Mirovaia Ekonomika I Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniia*, no. 5 (1996): 41.

³² Mikhail Alfimov, "RFFI I Nauka V Rossii: Opyt Pervykh Piaty Let," *Poisk*, no. 25, 1997, 6.

³³ Zhores Alferov, "Ne Poddaetsia Vdokhnoven'e, No...", *Poisk*, no. 3 (1992): 13.

Deborah Yarsike Ball in 2001 showed that in rank-and-file scholars, grants soon became associated with a new, pushy and ambitious type of persona.³⁴

While scientists were expected to become entrepreneurs, in the humanities scholars were supposed to be benefitting from grants by discovering new horizons of creativity, free from state control. For example, according to the Russian Foundation for the Humanities' charter, its goal was to promote "freedom of creative activity, and free choice of fields and methods of humanitarian scientific research."³⁵

According to some commentators, self-made academics were expected to be the new "leading scholars",³⁶ and grants were the means to create this new sort of academic persona. One of our informants, HSE Professor Elena Vishlenkova, said that filling in the grant application forms, reviewing other applicants' proposals and doing grant-funded work all helped her acquire new skills and competencies: "It was a school of proactivity. It brought together people who didn't want to just scrape from the bottom of the barrel. They wanted to upgrade their lives. To do this, they had to learn how to apply, take responsibility, deal with money and with all those study reports. People who were socially active went there."³⁷

For young researchers, grants obviously made sense in terms of career and professional development since they allowed them to gain new work experience, visit foreign countries, and make progress in their own research. One of our informants recalled with nostalgia that grants made it possible for him to concentrate on research work without worrying about anything else.³⁸ Sociologist Viktorija Antonova said that grants helped her to establish "good connections" and make "good friends."³⁹ Historian Kirill Levinson remembered: "I certainly benefitted greatly from it [sc. a series of scholarship-funded research stays in Germany - K.B., A.I.]. To begin with, it was my first long trip abroad on my own. <...> Almost everything that I have dug up in German archives was thanks to these scholarships."⁴⁰

³⁴Theodore Gerber and Deborah Yarsike Ball, "The State of Russian Science: Focus Groups with Nuclear Physicists," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 18, no. 3 (2002): 200.

³⁵"Ustav Rossijskogo gumanitarnogo nauchnogo fonda," *Vestnik Rossijskogo gumanitarnogo fonda*, no. 3 (2001): 292. See also: Andrei Iurevich, *Umnye no bednye: uchenye v sovremennoj Rossii* (Moscow: Izdatel'skij centr nauchnyh i uchebnyh programm, 1998): 44.

³⁶Aleksandr Chepurenski and Leonid Gokhberg, *Vosproizvodstvo Nauchnoi Elity V Rossii: Rol' Zarubezhnykh Nauchnykh Fondov: (Na Primere Fonda Imeni A.Gumbol'dta)* (Moscow: Rossiiskii nezavisimyi institut sotsial'nykh i natsional'nykh problem, 2005), 31. Another full member of the Academy stated: "[The grant system] means that you become master of your own destiny. Peter Aldhous, "A Scientific Community on the Edge," *Science*, 5163 (1994): 1263.

³⁷Elena Vishlenkova, Interview. Authors' archive (2012). See also: Gennadii Batygin, "Nevidimaia Granitsa: Grantovaia Podderzhka I Restrukturirovanie Nauchnogo Soobshchestva V Rossii," *Sotsial'nye Nauki V Postsovetskoj Rossii* (Moscow: Akademicheskii proekt, 2005), 331.

³⁸Mihail Sokolov, Interview. Authors' archive (2017). "Those were very fruitful years. Much of what I came up with, what I live on and what I will live on for the rest of my life, I came up with when I had a lot of money for those times and very few obligations."

³⁹Viktorija Antonova, Interview. Authors' archive (2013).

⁴⁰Kirill Levinson, Interview. Authors' archive (2017).

To be sure, networking and routine work for the sake of one's CV have always been and still are part of any researcher's 'business as usual'. Yet for former grantees, memories of this mundane academic life are colored by the feeling of discovery and nostalgia⁴¹:

I stretched out the \$1,500 I received so as to cover the travel expenses and a month's living in London. Can you imagine? And how interesting it was! Meeting fellow scholars whom you used to know only from articles and books, or even only from footnotes (there was no Internet yet, and not everything could be found in our libraries)... It meant, in fact, entering international academia, an environment outside of which doing one's research in the humanities was like talking to oneself to the point of slipping into total nonsense. <...> In the 1990s, at the early stage when all this just came into being here, when these novel forms of scholarly work were not yet fully institutionalized, it was a very lively system, I think, a really meritological one...⁴²

Such memories are not just an emotional story of the things past, for in the opinion of the informant, the consequences that experience was to have for their further life and academic identity were very significant. Stories of grant-funded work experience could make academic *Bildungsroman* episodes. Instructive in this context is Viktorija Antonova's observation that grants help one integrate into the community of scholars and that getting them is an important milestone in a young researcher's life and professional development. She describes the first experience with a grant-funded work is a kind of initiation:

In my opinion, this is one of the most interesting stages in the life of a researcher. Back in the 90s, it was probably the first glance one threw into the world out there. <...> The fact is that when you start working with Western scientific organizations, with foundations and universities that you are assigned as a researcher, lecturer or intern, you begin to develop a completely new view of the world. You begin to feel involved in all those vast and multiple processes that have previously passed you by or you have not felt like an insider. Now you can see your academic opportunities expanding, your opportunities to explore new cultures are expanding, and, which has always been my greatest joy, so are your opportunities to bring home stories about this difference, tell them, and show this difference to people back here.⁴³

⁴¹ See: Oili-Helena Ylijoki, "Academic Nostalgia: A Narrative Approach To Academic Work," *Human Relations* 58, no. 5 (2005): 555-576, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726705055963>.

⁴² Ol'ga Bessmertnaja, "Interv'ju S Ol'goj Jur'evnoj Bessmertnoj" (2015), accessed November 15, 2020, <https://igiti.hse.ru/unimemory/int-bessm>.

⁴³ Viktorija Antonova, Interview. Authors' archive (2013).

Judging from the interviews, the ideals and concepts embodied in a certain type of academic persona that were taking roots in the public discourse of the 1990s could indeed influence the decisions and actions of researchers and educators. Their stories about working intensely and independently and about their professional development the trajectory of which they could determine single-handedly are more than just accounts of facts. They imply certain ideas about what is right. It seems quite evident that behind these stories there is a belief that the actions and decisions described in them were right and that in certain circumstances they can be examples for others to follow. Even if the informants themselves don't claim to be the new academic personae, they imply the existence of such an ideal and refer to it in one way or another.⁴⁴

4. Economic Crisis and *Survival*

Applying for research grants was by no means always subject to the internal logic of an applicant's academic development and professional growth. The grant-based research funding system's development has been taking place amidst a difficult financial situation in the country and its academia, and this perpetual crisis never failed to remind of itself. For those who planned to continue their research and teaching in Russia, competing for grants and scholarships was one of the few options.

The deep economic and social crisis that post-Soviet Russia was going through hit science hard. Compared to late Soviet times, scholars' salaries decreased five to six times by 1993, when more than half of them were paid below the subsistence wage.⁴⁵ University professors found themselves in a similar situation⁴⁶, which showed no signs of improvement until the 2000s.⁴⁷ Even those who, in spite of everything, stayed in academia were often forced to moonlight, risking to lose their standing in the profession altogether. The press was full of reports telling about research vessels used for cruises⁴⁸, academics working as cab drivers⁴⁹, etc. Those who did not want to seek additional income outside academia could apply for research grants.

⁴⁴ See: Lorraine Daston and Otto Sibum. Op. cit.

⁴⁵ Loren Graham and Irina Dezhina, *Science In The New Russia: Crisis, Aid, Reform* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008): 20. On the funding of science in 1991-1993 see: Peter Kneen, "Science in shock: Russian science policy in transition," *Europe-Asia Studies* 47, no. 2 (1995): 289-291, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668139508412256>.

⁴⁶ Vitalij Korol'kov, "Kadrovaja Situacija V Vyshej Shkole: Tendencii I Problemy," *Vyshee Obrazovanie V Rossii*, no. 6 (2000): 15-16.

⁴⁷ Loren Graham and Irina Dezhina, *Science In The New Russia*, 18-33; Slavo Radosevic, "Patterns Of Preservation, Restructuring And Survival: Science And Technology Policy In Russia In Post-Soviet Era," *Research Policy*, 32, no. 6 (2003): 1107-1108, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0048-7333\(02\)00117-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0048-7333(02)00117-8).

⁴⁸ Aleksandr Konoshenko, "Den'gi, den'gi," *Poisk*, no. 17, 1992, 1.

⁴⁹ Michael Freemantle, "Russian Science on the Rack," *Chemical & Engineering News* 75, no. 51 (1997): 28, <https://doi.org/10.1021/cen-v075n051.p025>.

Survival was one of the most characteristic words of that era. It referred, among other things, to scholars' trying to procure additional funding for their projects rather than for themselves⁵⁰. In later interviews, too, informants often describe getting research grants as a way to 'survive' in the 1990s. Chemist Galina Chmutova recalls:

In the 1990s, many professors survived thanks to grants. Not only domestic but also Western ones. There were also joint grants. In my opinion, they were a bailout for a number of scientific schools and fields of study. <...> All in all I think Western scientific foundations helped Russian scholars to survive.⁵¹

Historian Igor' Danilevskij's appreciation of Soros Foundation grants is quite similar: "By the way, it is thanks to this foundation that our humanities survived the first post-Soviet decade. If it had not been for this foundation, these disciplines would now be in quite a deplorable condition."⁵²

In the opinion of our informants, not only one's belonging to a profession or a corporation but, in a sense, one's very life could be at stake, so that *survival* ought to be understood almost literally. Such claims had merit since the economic conditions of the 90s were harsh. Speaking in a typical 1990s' tragic spirit⁵³, Elena Smiljanskaja recalls "the old folks", i.e. elderly scholars, who "escaped starvation death" thanks to the financial support from Soros⁵⁴. Such support was not so much about financing science as about charity. Accordingly, a grant could not be just a contract under which the parties' relations ended upon the fulfillment of their obligations. It created lasting emotional bonds. Informants often show an emotional relationship with grant makers and express gratitude to them, a feeling that would hardly arise in case of a 'just business' relationship, even a win-win one:

...I want to say that many of my fellow scholars feel a huge gratitude to Soros. There were a number of scientific foundations, primarily the Soros one, who supported people in academia. They simply saved a whole generation of historians in Russia by giving them money for

⁵⁰ See for instance: Peter Aldhous, "A Scientific Community on the Edge," *Science*, 5163 (1994): 1262. "International collaborations, competitive grants, e-mail, and freedom to travel are beginning to transform some sectors of Russian science, but its very survival remains in doubt." Irina Samahova, "Bol'noj skoree zhiv..." *Literaturnaja gazeta*, no. 47, 1996, 12. "In order to survive academics have to address purely engineering tasks."

⁵¹ Galina Chmutova, "Interv'ju s Galinoy Alekseevoj Chmutovoj" (2013), accessed November 15, 2020, <https://igiti.hse.ru/unimemory/int-chmutova>. See very similar description of Soros' grants by biologist Mihail Gelfand: "At that time, only people who had some contacts with the West and could conduct their experiments abroad were surviving in experimental sciences. The Soros Foundation helped many people to survive. I know people, including myself, who stayed in Russia thanks to this support. If I didn't have a Soros grant, I would probably have to leave the country despite the fact that my science is a cheap one." "Kul't I Inflitsiia Vysshego Obrazovaniia: Zachem V Rossii Vsem Nuzhny Diplomy I Pochemu Oni Nichego Ne Znachat" (2017), accessed November 15, 2020, <https://special.theoryandpractice.ru/education-cult>.

⁵² Igor' Danilevskij, "Interv'ju s Igorem Nikolaevichem Danilevskim" (2012), accessed November 15, 2020, https://igiti.hse.ru/unimemory/int-danilevsk?_r=207011363983774.48311&__t=478029&__r=OK.

⁵³ See: Nancy Ries, *Russian Talk* (Ithaca (N.Y.): Cornell University Press, 1997).

⁵⁴ Elena Smiljanskaja, Interview. Authors' archive (2012). Philologist Elena Dragalina-Chernaja also spoke of "hungry scholars". Elena Dragalina-Chernaja, Interview. Authors' archive (2018).

publishing books and for summer schools, by paying them scholarships and archive research grants.⁵⁵

Apparently, in some cases showing gratitude means admitting one's own weakness. "Survival" can be interpreted as the fate of suffering and therefore passive recipients of charity aid. This is consistent with the data collected in the 1990s, which suggests that quite a few Russian academics who felt bitter about the severe decline in their wealth and symbolic status suffered from some form of psychological crisis or another.⁵⁶ In a number of interviews taken by students of the HSE School of History's seminar in the 2010s, psychological victimhood of the interviewees is quite noticeable. It manifests itself in other memories of the 1990s too.⁵⁷

Some academics, however, found reasons for optimism, at least they showed it in their post factum ego-narratives. Not infrequently, interviewees fashion themselves as agents who do use help but know they should mainly count on themselves: "Unless you make efforts to survive and flop about, then it's over <...> you will become inoperable", said Elena Vishlenkova in the interview.⁵⁸ Although the circumstances were very hard at times, they motivated rather than depressed some of the Russian academics, and the tragic situation provided a good backdrop for the struggle-and-success stories they told.

In the interviews, stories of lives proper for proactive and free academic personae combine with routine complaints and lamentations about the hardships of life. Anthropologist Nancy Ries who conducted field research between 1989 and 1995 noted that such complaining and hard-life narratives were utilized by many of her Russian interviewees to demonstrate not only their weakness but also their strength and ingenuity, emphasizing the heroic efforts it cost them to overcome adversity⁵⁹. The economic crisis in Russia was, on the one hand, an obstacle for grantees and, on the other hand, a resource that allowed them to build their identities as free and active members of academia.

5. Personal Is Too Personal. Criticism of the Grant System

While offering new opportunities to a number of Russian scholars and giving them a sense of freedom and self-consciousness, enhanced agency was also fraught with danger. For those who

⁵⁵ Elena Vishlenkova, Interview. Authors' archive (2012). Gratitude to Soros personally and to his foundations is not specific to academia. For instance ballet dancer Sergei Vikharev said in an interview: "They always cut out of all my interviews, but I always say thank you to the Soros Foundation. These words never get published, as if there were a black mark next to them. Poor Soros, he helped a lot of people!" Sergej Viharev, "O Korovah Vozle Stancii Metro, Baletnoj Notacii I Blistatel'nom Desjatiletii Mariinskogo Teatra" (2013), accessed November 17, 2020, <http://oralhistory.ru/talks/orh-1514/text>.

⁵⁶ Andrei Iurevich, *Umnye no bednye*, 47-62.

⁵⁷ Gatina, Grebenkina, "Lichnye Vospominanija O Postsovetских Universitetah I Arhiv Professorskoj Identichnosti", 276.

⁵⁸ Elena Vishlenkova, Interview. Authors' archive (2012).

⁵⁹ Nancy Ries, *Russian Talk*, 111-113. See also: Olga Shevchenko, *Crisis And The Everyday In Postsocialist Moscow* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009): 11.

considered a scholar's self to be inseparable from their personal material interests and attitudes, grants could not help but be associated with corruption and subjectivity dangerous for the academic world, irrational personal predilections harmful to the search for truth and for normal interaction with one's fellow scholars⁶⁰. The competition of ideas threatened to become a competition of applicants' characters and connections.⁶¹

In 2001, linguist Revekka Frumkina voiced a rather common opinion that many grant proposals were just "tinhorn racket."⁶² It was obvious that by no means all scholars had fully accepted the new rules of the game. In some of the interviews taken in the 2010s, informants still voiced the old desire to disassociate themselves from people they called "grant hunters"⁶³ and from the bogus research practices that spread following the advent of research grants. These academic nihilists regarded "grant eating" involving "politically correct pseudo-research" as a profanation of science.⁶⁴

Confidence in the grant-based funding system was further undermined by its institutional problems that were obvious to academics and combined with the legacy Soviet-time ideas of how academia should work and how scholars should behave.

The two big Russian grant makers – RFBR and RFH – employed the personnel and used the premises of the former Soviet Academy of Sciences, thus being, in a sense, heirs to the old system which was incompatible with independent peer reviewing.⁶⁵ These two foundations' reputation was seen by some as compromised after corruption schemes were revealed with reviewers and applicants conspiring with each other. Such cases were made public and even the foundations' management admitted them.⁶⁶ Not only Russian but also foreign foundations were known to violate their own proposal selection procedures. On a number of widely discussed occasions, grants were announced to be distributed on a competitive basis only for the competitions to be cancelled and the money to be distributed at will by the foundations' boards.⁶⁷

To make things worse, academics strongly disagreed on which fields of research deserved financial support and which did not. Moreover, they could not even agree on who exactly could be

⁶⁰ See: Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone books, 2010): 115-190; Cathryn Carson, "Objectivity And The Scientist: Heisenberg Rethinks," *Science In Context* 16, no. 1-2 (2002): 243-245.

⁶¹ "In my opinion, personal predilections play a significant role in the awarding of grants by the Russian Foundation for the Humanities and the Russian Foundation for Basic Research. That's a feeling I have, anyway". Aleksandr Kamenskij, Interview (2013), accessed November 17, 2020, <https://igiti.hse.ru/unimemory/interview>. Batygin, "Nevidimaia Granitsa", 331.

⁶² Revekka Frumkina, "Malen'kie Istorii Iz Zhizni Nauki," *Novyi Mir*, no. 6 (2001): 161.

⁶³ "I wasn't much of a grant hunter in the 90s. My life was different. What mattered to me was doing my job." Andrej Nemzer, Interview. Authors' archive (2017).

⁶⁴ "It is the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation thanks to which I spent two years in Germany. However, that was not what came to be called, somewhat contemptuously, 'grant eating'. I was not grabbing one grant after another to produce some politically correct pseudo-research." Aleksej Rutkevich, Interview. Authors' archive (2012). See also: "It's not that I am hopping from one grant to another. My trajectory is different." Jan Levchenko, Interview. Authors' archive (2018).

⁶⁵ Aleksandr Bikbov, *Grammatika Poriadka: Istoricheskaia Sotsiologiia Poniatii, Kotorye Meniaut Nashu Real'nost'*, 282, 285; Batygin, "Nevidimaia Granitsa", 329.

⁶⁶ "Iz Vystuplenii V Sovete Rossiiskogo Gumanitarnogo Nauchnogo Fonda," *Vestnik Rossijskogo Gumanitarnogo Nauchnogo Fonda*, no. 2 (1997): 58-59; See: Batygin, "Nevidimaia Granitsa", 338.

⁶⁷ Ol'ga Kazanskaia and Ol'ga Rachkova, "Detiam kapitanov – Granty," *Kommersant Den'gi*, no. 37, 1995, 12.

considered a scholar in the first place. The Soviet humanities suffered a severe blow after the collapse of the communist ideology, as many new and different disciplinary fields and communities emerged that supported or criticized the Soviet legacy. The 'scientificity' of their research was often disputed, including and especially by natural scientists. It was not easy to find common ground under such conditions. In an attempt to address this problem Mikhail Gasparov, a famous philologist and board member of the Russian Foundation for the Humanities, said that, when assessing grant proposals, reviewers should not look either to the Soviet past or to the currently fragmented Russian humanities. All they should consider was the "relevance" of a proposal under discussion for "international basic research."⁶⁸

The situation was no less difficult in natural sciences, which included many self-contained, classified research fields catering solely to the needs of the government, many scientists who were rather managers than researchers, and many individual scholars and research groups that were barely known to the rest of the scientific community but kept receiving funding as if by their own momentum. Under the new conditions, many scientists lost their bearings and had difficulty telling who was who in Russian academia.⁶⁹

The foundations' appeal to the supposedly united "community" of scholars as a whole was not always convincing, as they only could support just a few researchers and teams.⁷⁰ Grants, in this sense, only exacerbated inequality rather than smoothed it out.⁷¹ Voices were raised according to which academia was to become a winner-take-all market. Vladimir Kadyshevsky, head of the Joint Institute for Nuclear Research in Dubna, declared in 1994 that some scholars were "ballast" that one should get rid of.⁷² Academics thrown overboard hardly could be expected to be accepting of this trend. However, the main target of criticism was not the foundations' implacable "market economy-style" selection procedure but the allegedly unfair and rigged distribution system itself, which, according to its critics, resembled Soviet-style cronyism and patronage (*blat*) rather than an efficient market.⁷³ Historian Irina Karatsuba voiced this attitude in her interview:

⁶⁸Vitalii Kostomarov, "Chto Est' I Chto Ne Est' Prioritet," *Vestnik Rossiiskogo Gumanitarnogo Nauchnogo Fonda*, no. 2 (1997): 28.

⁶⁹Theodore Gerber and Deborah Yarsike Ball, Op. cit.: 199.

⁷⁰ On *community* see: Evgenij Semenov, "Rossijskij gumanitarnyj nauchnyj fond – finansist i kul'turtreger," *Sociologicheskie issledovanija*, no. 3 (1995): 35; "Reshenie soveta Rossijskogo gumanitarnogo nauchnogo fonda ot 18 fevralja 2000 g.," *Vestnik Rossijskogo gumanitarnogo nauchnogo fonda*, no. 2 (2000): 132.

⁷¹ See: Gerber, Ball, Op. cit.: 202-203; Andrei Iurevich, "Rassloenie Rossiiskogo Nauchnogo Soobshchestva," in *Sotsial'nye Nauki V Postsovetskoj Rossii* (Moscow, Akademicheskii proekt, 2005), 323-340; Aleksandr Allakhverdian, Irina Dezhina, and Andrei Iurevich, "Zarubezhnye Sponsory Rossiiskoi Nauki: Vampiry Ili Santa-Klausy?," *Mirovaia Ekonomika I Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniia*, no. 5 (1996): 42; Irina Dezhina and Sergei Egerev, "Vliianie Grantovoi Sistemy Finansirovaniia Poka Ne Stalo Strukturoobrazuiushchim," *Nezavisimaia Gazeta-Nauka*, no. 11, 1998, 9.

⁷² Peter Aldhous, "A Scientific Community on the Edge," *Science*, 5163 (1994): 1262.

⁷³ See: Alena Ledeneva, *Russia's economy of favours: Blat, networking, and informal exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

That grant system was something! I have received grants from RHF twice. Damned if I had a chance of getting them other than through connections. The Soviet grant system of the 1990s and 2000s worked strictly by the "no strangers" principle. As a walk-in you had no chance of getting a grant! <...> As a rule, everything depended on the reviewers. If a reviewer was smart enough, he approved smart proposals, and if he was erm... (*rolling her eyes*), he approved accordingly. But could a stranger get anything? Up yours! Well, maybe one out of a hundred, but not more.⁷⁴

Even though foundations' speakers claimed having succeeded in gaining the public's confidence in the grant distribution procedure as early as the 1990s⁷⁵, things were not quite that easy.⁷⁶ Publicly expressed doubts about the integrity of the system were still quite common. Neither in the 1990s, nor, perhaps, later did the foundations ever succeed in convincing the majority of academia that they were what they wanted to appear. No consensus existed concerning the correctness of their decisions, so it was a fertile ground for various suspicions. Some of them were diametrically opposite. Some feared that proposals lacking any scientific merit could win with the help of corruption schemes, there was also a belief that valuable scientific work was not being properly paid for, and that Western funds were buying up Russian scholars' discoveries "on the cheap."⁷⁷ The proposal evaluation procedures and criteria still lacked transparency⁷⁸.

Defending themselves against allegations of bias and corruption, foundations emphasized that any "non-scientific" criteria were ruled out and that the reviewers' decisions were as objective as they could be. On the other hand, special grant-based funding programs were launched to support provincial research teams that were not up to competing with Moscow-based ones on a purely merit

⁷⁴ Irina Karacuba, "Interv'ju s Irinoj Vladimirovnoj Karacuba" (2012), accessed November 19, 2020, <https://igiti.hse.ru/unimemory/int-karatzuba>. For similar criticisms see: Mihail Grebenkin, "Interv'ju s Mihailom Jur'evichem Grebenkinym" (2013), accessed November 19, 2020, <https://igiti.hse.ru/unimemory/int-grebenkin>. "Grants, provided they are distributed honestly, are probably useful, but they are often distributed 'among their own', turning into honeypots for small coteries." Sergej Krih, "Interv'ju s Sergeem Borisovichem Krihom" (2012), accessed November 19, https://igiti.hse.ru/unimemory/int-krih?_r=214561363986036.70007&__t=478052&__r=OK. "In our country it (sc. the distribution of grants - K.B., A.I.) inevitably degenerates into bureaucratization, dilution of the main idea and, of course, a way of money laundering. The lion's share of grants is now distributed by the government or agencies close to it, and in the Russian context this in itself has negative effects". Graham, Dezhina. Op. cit., 56; Aleksandr Kornet, "V Poiskakh Granta," *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, no. 168, 1996, 6. See also: Modest Kolerov, "Nauka bez gosudarstva," *Otechestvennye Zapiski*, no. 7 (2002): 156.

⁷⁵ "Vstupitel'noe slovo na zasedanii soveta RGNF ot 18 fevralia 2000 g. predsedatel'ia soveta RGNF akademika V.L.Ianina," *Vestnik Rossijskogo Gumanitarnogo Nauchnogo Fonda*, no. 2 (2000): 61; "Reshenie soveta Rossijskogo humanitarnogo nauchnogo fonda ot 18 fevralja 2000 g.," *Vestnik Rossijskogo humanitarnogo nauchnogo fonda*, no. 2 (2000): 132.

⁷⁶ In 1996 68% of the respondents said that "personal connections" (i.e. corruption) affected experts' decisions. Allakhverdian, Dezhina, Iurevich, "Zarubezhnye Sponsory Rossiiskoi Nauki: Vampiry Ili Santa-Klausy?," 43.

⁷⁷ Idem, 41. See also: Gerber, Ball, "The State of Russian Science", 204; Aleksandr Chepurenski and Leonid Gokhberg, *Vosproizvodstvo Nauchnoi Elity V Rossii: Rol' Zarubezhnykh Nauchnykh Fondov: (Na Primere Fonda Imeni A.Gumbol'dta)* (Moscow: Rossiiskii nezavisimyi institut sotsial'nykh i natsional'nykh problem, 2005): 41; Andrei Vaganov, "Zapadni Pylesos' Dlia Rossiiskoi Nauki," *Otechestvennye Zapiski*, no. 7 (2002): 290-299; Tat'jana Vinogradskaja, "Kladbishhe idej ili ostrov sokrovishh," *Pravda*, no. 17, 1993, 2.

⁷⁸ The term was conceptualized by M. Lamont. Michèle Lamont, "Toward A Comparative Sociology Of Valuation And Evaluation," *Annual Review Of Sociology* 38, no. 1 (2012): 201-221, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-070308-120022>. On debates about criteria in Soros Foundation see: Valeri Soifer, Op. cit., 138-140.

basis. Also, for the sake of preserving the infrastructure and the existing academic scene, "scientific schools" were supported, which meant that even inferior proposals were approved due to past achievements of the applicants' (former) teachers and coworkers.⁷⁹

When distributing its famous 500-dollar grants designed to save Russian scholars in 1993, the Soros Foundation relied on bibliometric data collected by the Philadelphia-based Institute for Scientific Information⁸⁰, whose role, however, was considered purely technical. "Not Americans, but computers would distribute grants to our own researchers," the foundation's representatives explained.⁸¹ An overly strict adherence to formal rules too narrowly understood even gave rise to criticism from former Soviet scholars who were not accustomed to such use of bibliometric data.⁸² In fact, the foundation's staff did consider many other criteria as well. They openly admitted that political views of applicants and their place in the administrative hierarchy also mattered much.⁸³

Something similar to the American dilemma of diversity and excellence⁸⁴ existed not only at the level of the foundations' overall strategy but also at the level of proposal reviewing: "A dilemma arises as to whom to support: a provincial teacher whose work 'doesn't quite make it' yet but who may be promising and needs to be given a 'boost' to grow, – or teachers whose work is highly rated according to the established criteria but they are already accomplished scholars."⁸⁵

The foundations never made the hierarchy of and the relations between different criteria and different logics of proposal evaluation a subject of their reflection. While declaring openness, they were reluctant to let outsiders have a look inside the black box of peer review, confining themselves instead to objectivity claims.

* * *

As early as the 1990s, there were not only staunch advocates and fierce opponents of the grant-based research funding system in Russia but also cynical people to whom getting money from politically committed organizations seemed to resemble the Soviet experience in which financing was inseparable from political loyalty. Only Soviet patriotism was now replaced by the values of liberal democracy. Many foundations' grant programs had a visible political component to them. Modems shipped to Russia with the support of the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) were

⁷⁹ Nikita Tolstoj, "Slovo k chitatelju," *Vestnik Rossijskogo gumanitarnogo nauchnogo fonda*, no. 1 (1995): 5-6; Evgenij Semenov, "Rossijskij gumanitarnyj nauchnyj fond – finansist i kul'turtreger," *Sociologicheskie issledovanija*, no. 3 (1995): 37-38. On informal preferences and official programs for regions, women and young people in Russia see: Irina Dezhina, "Zarubezhnye programmy i fondy v rossijskoj nauke: dinamika razvitija (1993-1996 gg.)," *Obshhestvo i jekonomika*, no. 7 (1996): 71-76.

⁸⁰ "Mezhdunarodnyj nauchnyj fond," *Izvestija*, no. 36, 1993, 7.

⁸¹ Vladimir Miheev and Kim Smirnov, "100 millionov iz fonda Sorosa," *Izvestija*, no. 3, 1993, 5.

⁸² Vitalii Ginzburg, "U nas byla drugaia sistema...". *Poisk*, no. 13, 1993, 4.

⁸³ T. Slavina, "Derzajte, Nyne Obodrenny...." 7.

⁸⁴ Michèle Lamont, *How Professors Think: Inside The Curious World Of Academic Judgment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009): 202-238.

⁸⁵ Olga Molchanova, Interview. Authors' archive (2016). See also: Dezhina, "Zarubezhnye programmy i fondy v rossijskoj nauke: dinamika razvitija (1993-1996 gg.)," 73.

meant to become the technological basis of democracy⁸⁶, while ‘open society’ was not only the name of George Soros’ foundation but also its ultimate goal, which was to be achieved, among other things, by supporting science.⁸⁷ Some scholars were ready to play along with the foundations. Moreover, even applicants who suspected foreign grant makers were actually pursuing sinister goals that threatened Russia's national security continued to take grants from them and/or support their distribution, even if with certain reservations. According to a viewpoint shared by many Russian scholars interviewed in the mid-1990s, “it doesn’t matter for what reasons foreign sponsors are helping us, the main thing is that they are doing it.”⁸⁸

However, in interviews many years later, when any material or political incentive for them to pretend to be sincere supporters of liberal and democratic values was gone, informants were not so cynical as to claim that they had been merely taking advantage of Western foundations. Instead, they still talked about the grants helping them to be strong and independent scholars or upheld the tragic narrative, speaking of life hazard, salvation and gratitude. Some also condemned the practices that emerged in the 1990s, which were reminiscent of the Soviet ways:

As for the implementation of the mega-idea itself, what Soros failed to take into account was the specific Soviet and post-Soviet mentality. In the 90s, people would write anything for the money from Soros, just like they did before for the privileges from the Communist party. The wave of articles and fat books about the ‘open society’ was impressive. As a result, they buried both Popper and themselves in idle talk. Which means that in terms of ideas, the results of Soros' work in the 90s were negative for Russia’s intellectual elite: they not so much learned to think freely, as they understood how to ‘correctly’ draw scientific ideas from the West or from each other to get grants for it.⁸⁹

5. Conclusion

In a way, the grant-based funding system has become a metaphor for the new era in post-Soviet Russia, epitomizing its competitiveness, its unsettledness, its risks, its openness to the world and new opportunities. At the same time, for individual scholars grants were important elements of their identity and life experience as they remembered it later. Those who stayed in academia despite

⁸⁶ *Rossiiskii Internet: Nakanune Bol'shikh Peremen* (Moscow: Pomatur, 2000): 227.

⁸⁷ George Soros, *Open Society: Reforming Global Capitalism* (New York: Public Affairs, 2000): 242.

⁸⁸ Allakhverdian, Dezhina, Iurevich, "Zarubezhnye Sponsory Rossiiskoi Nauki", 41.

⁸⁹ Sergej Krih, "Interv"ju s Sergeem Borisovichem Krihom" (2012), accessed November 19, https://igiti.hse.ru/unimemory/int-krih?_r=214561363986036.70007&__t=478052&__r=OK. Similar attitude expressed professor Loskutova: “A friend of mine needed money desperately, and so she went to work there [sc. the Open Society Institute]. But, of course, almost no-one who worked for this program took it seriously, they all laughed at it openly. It was so cynical, you know, that I didn’t want to play this game. I decided to go home, and then what would happen, would happen.” Marina Loskutova, Interview. Authors’ archive (2018).

all the difficulties created ego-narratives using ideas and interpretations that were already in use in the 1990s.

Interviewees' answers show what strategies of construing the research grant system existed. They speak of grants in the context of such themes as survival, professional growth, opportunity of joining the very special academic world, internationalization, consistency and bureaucracy, one's own flexibility and efforts to cope with pressing problems of life. The concepts of an academic persona that took shape in the 1990s proved reusable decades later when remembering one's past in an interview. The theme of grants, in turn, gets woven into a general narrative describing an academic persona's actions and achievements.

To be sure, influence of Bourdieu's *material factors* can be easily detected in interviews. It is with visible pleasure that interviewees talk about this, which, apparently, can be explained by the grants being prestigious. Those who succeeded in getting them view this as their own merit, while those who tried to get them but failed blame the system. But it seems that grants were more than just a tool for wealth distribution or a means of struggle for material resources within academia. Stories of getting or not getting them tell us something important about the people involved.

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Andrei A. Ilin

National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia). Poletayev Institute for Theoretical and Historical Studies in the Humanities. Senior research fellow;
E-mail: aailin@hse.ru

Ksenia M. Belik

National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia). Poletayev Institute for Theoretical and Historical Studies in the Humanities. Research Assistant;
E-mail: kbelik@hse.ru

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