



ILLUSTRATION: ALESSANDRO ALLORI

Russian researchers between Scylla and Charybdis

by Ekaterina Kalinina

Following up Dmitry Dubrovsky's article, published in this journal, on the Russian academic community at the start of the war in Ukraine,¹ this compilation of essays written by scholars who remain in Russia hopefully allows for a more nuanced picture of the professional experiences social science scholars have had since the war in Ukraine started.

This publication shares with the reader autobiographical reflections of five schol-

ars who still live and work in different regions of Russia. These social scientists have not left Russia for various reasons, which they themselves explain in their reflections. After having met at an informal meeting in early 2024, they have decided to voice their concerns about their troubled professional ethos caused by censorship, ideological pressure and repressive legislature. These concerns they conceptualize as moral dilemmas challenging their professional activities.

We have decided to publish these texts and to preserve their voices in order to let them tell their own stories to the reader. However, for the sake of security, all authors have decided to be pseudonymized. ✖

reference

- 1 Dmitry Dubrovsky, "War and the Academic Community in Russia", *Baltic Worlds*, vol. 15, no. 1–2 (2022): 38–44.

Experiences of survival strategies in dark times

by N.D.

I am grateful to the organizers of this discussion for their kind invitation to take part in it and discuss the moral dilemmas that the Russian academic and teaching community is facing since February 24, 2022. I will write about my own experience. After the start of the war, my initial reaction was to leave the country. At that time, I thought about the scientists and writers who emigrated from Nazi Germany in order not to identify with it, and I shared their views.

In March 2022, the European Commission decided to terminate cooperation with Russian organizations in the field of research, science and innovation. After that, some of my international projects were closed down. Besides, in international project teams, Russian participants were required to remove their affiliation with Russian universities. Now I can participate in international projects only as a private person. Some foreign scientific foundations have stopped working with researchers from Russia. After the start of the special military operation, it became impossible to engage in international educational activities. The master's program which I was head of included modules that were taught by Finnish anthropologists, but after February 2024, it became impossible to implement this program.

I TURNED TO MY foreign partners for help, trying to figure out new professional scenarios for myself. But the circumstances were such that I did not leave Russia, although a lot had changed in my professional life – I left the federal university because I did not want to share the official policy of the rectorate regarding the special military operation.

The university administration is convinced that after February 2022, teachers should focus on the topics that are seen as an important by the state, and not on those that are of interest to the researcher. There was an increase in aggressive

militaristic rhetoric and xenophobic discourse at the university: some lecturers began to speak regularly about “Ukrainian Nazism”, some teachers began to write expert opinions on the social media posts and statements of the opponents of the special operation and find in these statements traces of “extremism and terrorism”, while students with an anti-war position started to be expelled and denounced. Meanwhile the university started to produce drones.

After I quit working at my university, I became an associate researcher at another highly respected university. For me, scientific work has become my salvation.

“I DID NOT WANT TO SHARE THE OFFICIAL POLICY OF THE RECTORATE REGARDING THE SPECIAL MILITARY OPERATION.”

Over the past two years, my scientific paradigm has also changed. All my life I have been studying traditional cultures, but now I am researching cultural memory of the “dark” Soviet legacy – the memory of the Soviet repressions of 1917–1954 as well as the topic, insufficiently studied in Russia, of the trauma of the descendants of the repressed. After 2014 the topic of memory of Soviet repressions began to be actively stigmatized at the official level. It is becoming more and more difficult to study this topic as of the day. The discursive (internal) encapsulation of this “field” is of great concern to me.

TODAY, I AGAIN ask myself a set of questions about research in general. How can I collaborate with institutions/projects/

individuals who have declared their support for something I do not support? Can I work at such institution, participate in certain conferences, receive money from certain funds? And finally, how can I work with colleagues who don't share my views? Is it possible to combine civic/social positions with academic work? How can one exist permanently in the given circumstances? I have become more selective in social contacts and meet with colleagues less often.

I CAN ONLY SAY that at present many university professors obediently fulfill military requests, while others legitimize the acquisition of new territories with the help of military means. For me, the question remains: “How will Russian anthropologists who supported the ‘special operation’, openly or not, formulate their research and ethical position when military activities in Ukraine come to an end or become temporarily stopped?”, and whether there is for them a question of personal responsibility for the events taking place right now.

The year 2022 posed for the entire Russian scientific community the problem of the value and popularization of scientific knowledge, which should resist militant ignorance and pseudoscientific absurdity. Over the past twenty years, Russia has been constructing a national identity at the state level, based on the idea of war and the imperial greatness of the country. I believe that in the period of political transformation that our country is now experiencing, the role of a scholar in the humanities becomes more important. In the future, during the period of political transformation of the regime, the national identity will have to be reformed, and this process requires work with the country's “inconvenient” past, opening of the archives, and creating a new official discourse of cultural memory and the idea of Russia as a nation. ❌



Being a sociologist in Russia: Daily moral choices

by O.S.

With the full-scale military aggression of the Russian Federation in Ukraine, a wave (if not a tsunami) of discussions regarding moral and ethical issues rose in Russian anti-war circles. It seemed that most of these questions had long been resolved, and we were all well versed in “what is good and what is bad”. However, it was in the first months of the war “live”, and even more so on social networks, that there were literally battles over whether or not to leave Russia, whether or not to resign from state institutions, whether to maintain relations with relatives who support the war, and so on. All these discussions were served “under the sauce” of morality: is it moral to remain in the aggressor country? Is it moral to receive money and pay taxes to a state that kills civilians? I remember well how in the summer of 2022 I met with a colleague whom I had not seen for a long time, and we, interrupting each other, began to make excuses why we were still in Russia. Nobody forced us to do this, we did not ask each other questions, but in order for communication to take place,

both considered it necessary to first dot all the i’s, stating our position on both the war and emigration. This communication really looked like an excuse – we told each other about elderly parents who could not be left behind, about children and spouses who refused to leave, and so on. We made excuses to each other. The strategy of justification was to build hierarchies of our moral responsibilities. To simply say that we have made a decision to stay in Russia was not enough; it was necessary to place our decision to remain in Russia into the matrix of moral restrictions and rules and therefore to justify it both to ourselves and to others.

NOW PUBLIC DISPUTES have become quieter, or I no longer notice them. Nevertheless, on a daily basis, I am faced with moral dilemmas and forced to make some moral choices, whether in the personal or professional sphere. So, just a few days ago, my son asked me if I was willing to let him go on an archaeological expedition to the Crimea, where his friends from the archaeological club were going. In addition to security issues, our discussion

with him raised a train of questions with a moral background: why is it not right and even “bad” to travel to the occupied Ukrainian territories? Why does a seemingly “innocent” study of archaeology become a political statement? The issues of trips to Crimea are not regulated by law in any way, but in my opinion, this is a matter of an individual moral taboo set back in 2014. Here in this text, I would like to reflect on a few points regarding moral dilemmas in the professional sphere.

1. Choosing a research topic in a war situation

A couple of months ago, I got to an online seminar organized by Finnish colleagues with whom I had worked before in research projects. Besides professional relations, by now we have friendly relations. I must admit that this was the first invitation to participate in a professional meeting since the beginning of the war. Before that, despite the fact that I had expressed my anti-war position publicly, I was isolated, my colleagues “canceled” me, and I really want to hope that this was only temporary. The seminar was devoted to the issue of cooperation with Russia in the current conditions. My colleague from Finland made a remark about why she decided not to conduct any more field research in Russia, and justified her refusal by saying that it is “unethical” now. I must admit that at that moment I was somewhat outraged by this statement. I thought that, on the contrary, it is all the more important to conduct research in Russia now, because you need to understand what is happening in Russian society. It should be “morally acceptable” to remain a professional, continuing to do “what is necessary”. However, for my colleague, trips to Russia became unacceptable, and human guidelines became more important than professional ones. Later, I caught myself in a situation where such boundaries exist also for me. I am

not ready to go to either the Crimea and or Mariupol, occupied by Russia in 2022, even for research purposes. Here all professional arguments recede into the background. It is difficult for me to formulate the reasons for such a categorical refusal. Perhaps this is a defensive psychological reaction: to avoid seeing destroyed houses and people's destroyed lives. It might be my own "milestone" of the national attribution of a territory – for me, this is the territory of Ukraine, and it is possible to conduct research there only jointly and by the invitation of Ukrainian colleagues. This position, I believe, is nothing more than a political statement nurtured on moral notions of what is good and right, and what is acceptable and what is not. In this case a professional question is transferred into the realm of morality, and it is through this prism of morality that decisions are made.

THE SAME IS TRUE for the choice of research topics and analytical focuses. Since the beginning of the war, I have worked as a volunteer helping refugees from Ukraine. At some point, in order to live through impossible emotions, I began to study (Ukrainian) refugees from the Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories, especially since one of my constant professional interests was migration. The research on refugees is a very difficult study. During the interview, it is impossible not to experience similar emotions as your interlocutor, who talks about bombings, hunger, death, humiliation, and so on. Among other things, in the study, I touch upon the topic of national identities and political views of refugees. It is important to note here that I conduct research among those who stay in Russia and do not continue their journey further to the West. These are people with different political views, and among them there are many people with pro-Russian views, who consider Russian aggression fair, who glorify Putin, perceiving him as a wise and fair leader. I confess that it is difficult for me to hear such narratives, perhaps even more difficult than stories about bombings. At one time, I even wanted to abandon this voluntary, unsupported study because I did not have the

strength to hear such wild, in my opinion, impossible stories. I must say, never before have I experienced such a contradictory attitude towards informants – from the strongest sympathy and empathy to wild irritation and even anger – your homes and lives have been destroyed, and you don't want to add "two plus two" and understand the reasons for what happened?! For some reason, it was very difficult for me to build a professional boundary, to distance myself from the

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object of research. Nevertheless, after a short break, I returned to this research, focusing specifically on the topic of political views and identities, redefining my attitude towards informants. I look at them not only from a professional perspective, but also from a humanitarian perspective, and no matter how far their ideas may be from my own, they need to be heard. Moreover, these people are a subject of double exclusion – both as Ukrainians in Russia, and as "traitors to Ukraine" who remained in Russia. Hence, I translated my attitude towards refugees whose political views are opposite to mine and with whom I would avoid contact in everyday life into the humanitarian optics. The research became easier, which is also probably not very professional, but this approach and this moral choice help me to continue the work.

2. Censorship and self-censorship

It is known that censorship is gaining momentum and pace in Russia: the distri-

bution of books by authors belonging to the political opposition is being banned; people are being prosecuted and imprisoned for public anti-war and anti-Putin statements. The number of denunciations increased many times over. In this situation, self-censorship is surprisingly easily and almost imperceptibly turned on. At first, you stumble in words, choosing, depending on the audience, whether to call the war a "war" or a "special military operation" (a publicly accepted name for Russian aggression in Ukraine). The ability to read the audience and calculate risks helps one to switch registers and introduce different discourses in time. Each time the choice of telling the truth and calling a spade a spade became a moral dilemma. However, then the stumbling in the words passes. I even caught myself completely excluding these words in public conversations, using instead non-judgmental and meaningless expressions such as "today's situation" and others. This is neither a refusal to call the war a war nor a hint at it, which is usually appealed to in the hope that "everyone will understand everything." This is not even Aesopian language one uses when one wants to convey an idea by using a doublespeak that is understandable among the initiated. In fact, this is an unconscious or conscious repression of the very theme of war, its avoidance.

THE AVOIDANCE of the topic of war also occurs at the institutional level. I work at a state research institute, where all employees are social researchers, and who else but they/we are to study what is happening now in Russian society, regardless of how one feels about the war and the state? However, in all public presentations of the research results conducted at the institute, it seems that there is no war, that there is nothing happening in society. The war seems to be excluded from research. Only in the corridors do my colleagues allow themselves to talk about painful topics. And I understand why this is happening. Most likely, people are afraid of potential problems at workplaces and even real persecution. At the same time, there is no official ban on war-related research. To ignore the topic of

war or not to include it in your research – is rather an individual choice.

HERE I WOULD LIKE TO note that it is very difficult to overcome self-censorship – it is easy to turn on, but it is much more difficult to turn it off. At some point, I decided that my fears were just fears, and I could try, even if I didn't openly call a spade a spade, to introduce topics related to the effects of the war on Russian society into professional sociological discussions. Now I slow down when I want to use a euphemism or a metaphor for the war, and try to professionally introduce the topic that, I confess, requires a certain courage and determination.

3. Work as a researcher in totalitarian and fascist Russia

All my professional life I happily avoided collaborations with state universities and worked at Independent Research Institutes. Unfortunately, our organization received the status of a foreign agent, and with the outbreak of the war, all the projects that we had been carrying out at our institute with foreign colleagues were terminated, and as a matter of fact, I lost my job. Since 2022, I have been work-

ing at a state research institute. And just like that, a moral dilemma of whether to work to not to work for a state university today turned out to be a matter of survival for me. I have found a compromise, allowing myself to earn money from the Russian state. In my academic activity at the institute, so far no one requires me to engage in ideologically biased topics, falsify results, etc., that is, to say and do something contrary to my professional ethics. Working at a state institution now is a forced compromise, which I made consciously. For myself, I solved it in the following way: I do my job, continue doing it honestly and, I hope, conduct high-quality research until I am required to betray my professionalism in the name of ideology, etc. Besides, I keep an opportunity to do research on my own, and not within the framework of an institution. I consider it to be necessary and extremely important to do research right now in order to understand what is happening in Russia, how and why the war became possible and so many people support it and to see “the other side of the coin”, in particular the resistance of the weak. Such parallel research takes a lot of effort and resources, often coming at the expense of huge self-exploitation and possible early burnout, but professional interest and

understanding of the importance of such research wins over. I realize that when I got a job at a state institution, I made a compromise. But I set moral boundaries for myself, defining a “breaking point” after which it would be impossible to continue working without betraying myself. And the realization that such boundaries are defined helps a great deal.

THERE WILL BE NO conclusions to this text, only a couple of points I would like to make at the end. Our moral dilemmas are solved primarily at the individual level, independently. It seems that now there are no previously working rules and guidelines, and you are forced to redefine and collect them for yourself anew, on your own. You determine the boundaries of what is acceptable and impossible, while understanding that these are only your standards and decisions, and you cannot apply them to other people. Moral dilemmas are daily choices we have to make, and obviously it's important not to miss them. It's important to ask yourself the moral questions regularly. Perhaps there are no answers to these questions, but I understand that they need to be asked. ❌

Constantly balancing risks and safety

by M.K.

In 2022 after February 24, when the Russian army crossed the border and attacked Ukrainian cities, my life changed a lot: Just like the lives of all Russian people who disagreed with the decision of the Russian leadership to start the war. At the same time in terms of daily routine, it seemed that almost nothing had changed: I live where I was living before the war and work where I have worked in recent years. Even my field of academic interest remained the same in a broad sense. Before February 24, I spent

many years studying grassroots protest activism in Russia: I went to rallies and recorded interviews, and wrote academic papers about it. On February 24, I went to an anti-war rally in my city and began recording interviews there, as always.

BEFORE THE WAR I could write papers about protests, use the affiliation of my university and mention these papers in my annual academic reports. But after February 24 the situation has changed dramatically. Now my academic life is

divided into studies that can be reported on, those that are risky to report on, and those that definitely cannot be reported on. The latter includes studies on the attitude of Russians to the war with Ukraine. I consider these research projects as the most important part of my work today. However, I publish research on the attitude of Russians to the war either anonymously, or under my own name, but without affiliation with my university, and I do not mention it in my official annual reports.

I do not consider the very fact of working at a Russian state university as reprehensible because I refuse to “adapt” in any way to the official political position of my country. Moreover, I openly speak out against the war, and all my friends and colleagues know this. I went to all anti-war rallies, and openly expressed my anti-war position on social media. At the same time, I know that for my Ukrainian colleagues, the very fact of working at a Russian university seems reprehensible and I don’t know how to talk to them about it.

I am not going to resign from the university on my own initiative, because (so far) at our university we are not forced to do or say anything in support of the war. Some relative academic freedom is still preserved, but I live in constant fear that I could be fired at any moment. In the spring of 2023, my immediate superior said that the university administration was checking university employees’ social media. I replied that I would not delete any posts and or change my avatar (I have the flag of Ukraine on it), but I would remove the official university affiliation from my profile and hope that they would not find me without it. Before this, I mentioned my workplace on Facebook with all the details such as when I started to work there but I deleted it.

AFTER THE WAR STARTED, I did several field-trips in connection to my work at the university and in collaboration with another institution from which my colleagues and I have a small grant. The grant was dedicated to the research on memory studies. In all interviews I asked about the interviewee’s attitude to the ongoing war. I did it not at the beginning of the interview, but somewhere near the end. Meanwhile, my colleagues tried to avoid talking about contemporary events, and we debated whether it was necessary to talk about today’s events at all. I insisted that it was necessary, because firstly, it seemed to me that it was simply impossible not to ask about it, because this is the main event of our time, and secondly, the topic itself in general presupposed the interviewees to move from the memory of Great Patriotic War to the fact that we again ended up at war. My colleagues thought that this topic



was too dangerous to pick up and more than once they tried to pull me back when we did interviews together. I was angry that I was not allowed to talk about what I thought was the most important topic. I must say that I not only asked, but in most cases voiced my own position in these interviews. My colleagues scolded me especially for this, referring to the fact that I

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put not only myself in danger, but also the institution for which we are conducting research. Then I thought that I really did not want to let the institution down, so I began to be more careful when expressing my position, to speak only when asked or when I understood that the informant shared my views. However, I did not stop asking, because talking about the past wars without touching on the ongoing conflicts seems to me simply meaningless. There was a similar case when I did a field trip connected to research at my main workplace. A colleague repeatedly told me that informants took me for a provocateur because I asked, “such ques-

tions”. I don’t know whether it is true as the informants didn’t tell me this. Some answered evasively or ignored some questions, but maybe someone thought I was a provocateur.

WHEN I PARTICIPATED in a research project which gathered data about the attitudes of Russians to the war, I also thought about whether to express my opinion during interviews. Each time the solution was different depending on the circumstances and the relations with the interviewee. When I interviewed people I had known prior to the interview, I allowed myself to express my position and even ask about their position, although I know that not everyone in the scientific community would approve of this. At the same time, sometimes I had situations when strangers who supported the war opened up to me, while I never told them my position. After such interviews, there was a sense of residue, as if I had deceived a person. However, for me, a certain “red line” was and still remains the ban on directly lying to the informant. That is, I would never agree when the informant says something unacceptable to me. Well, I often tried not to argue with unfamiliar informants, but still, I will never say things like “yes, yes, they attacked themselves”.

The issue of informants’ safety is very important. I have interviewed political activists before, but now that I understand that you can be prosecuted for an anti-war statement, I am very afraid to leave any traces. I delete audio from my devices, but you never know: What if they seize my equipment and find some data or even hack my communication tools and reach

for my cloud storage. Therefore I always log out from my email and social media in the evenings, because I am afraid that one morning, the authorities may come to me and search through my belongings, as can happen to anyone who openly expresses anti-war views.

Hence, I think that maybe for the sake of my informants' safety, and not even for my own, it is worth somehow speaking up less. But it's too hard for me psychologically not to speak out. Therefore, I try to keep some kind of balance, and so far it seems to work out (since nobody has come to me). Maybe it's just pure luck.

I CONTINUE TO do observations of at least some street activity whenever possible. However, if earlier the chances of not getting an administrative offence for such activities were quite high, now there are almost none. When I went to watch the laying of flowers after the death of Alexei

Navalny, I was detained during an interview with an informant and sentenced to 10 days of administrative arrest. There was also a moral dilemma: my informant was detained during the interview, and I probably had a chance to silently speed up my pace and leave unnoticed, but I had to ask what he was being detained for and was detained as well. In general, for the sake of fairness, I will say that in previous years I had a couple of similar cases – when informants were detained, while I was not and somehow it felt unfair, as if I betrayed them. This time my conscience outweighed my fear, and I think I did the right thing.

And the last thing I would like to say is about publications. If before February 2022 I always published and made reports indicating my affiliation with a university, now in half of the cases I do not indicate affiliation, because I think that indicating affiliation might contribute to my dis-

missal. I am forced to write something for the sake of reporting, but something totally different because I feel such a moral necessity. More often than not I publish under my own name, because it is somehow sad to hide behind a pseudonym, although I understand that publishing under my own name also carries risks. There was, however a totally different case: when I was asked to remove an affiliation with a Russian institution in an ontology even though the publication itself was on a safe topic and could be useful for reporting on my activities. It was a pity, but I compromised. Somehow in this case I did not even think of fighting, perhaps also because the article was co-authored and I was not the main author. So I took it for granted. ✖

Coping strategies.

Auto-ethnography notes of a sociologist

by A.A.

Under conditions of political and ideological repression, following the rules of professional sociological ethos often contradicts the requirements of professional safety: the safety of the informant (the principle of “do no harm”) and the safety of a social scientist in different modes of professional activity. In this case, I mean such forms of a sociologist's professional work as teaching, conducting empirical research, and professional communication in various forums, domestic or international. In other words, if professional rules are strictly adhered to, then research and the presentation of its results risk causing trouble to the participants. A number of questions arise. Is it worth conducting such a study? Is it worth com-

promising by violating the rules of free speech? Or is it necessary to comply with the principles of academic freedom and put the informants and the audience at risk? What is the price of the issue? Our profession has become risky. Who should be put at risk and to what extent? In the name of what? How do we deal with dangers? My professional experience shows that the response to risks is the practice of anticipatory self-censorship. As a result, the modern sociological existence in Russia in the mode of self-censorship significantly devalues the significance of sociological statements.

IT IS WORTH mentioning that our professional activity is so diverse and rich in content that not all of its forms are sub-

ject to risks. Historians of social theory, social theorists and methodologists feel relatively safe, as do traditional researchers devoid of a critical spirit and those who study aspects of social reality that are far from the current political agenda. However, the number of sensitive topics politicized by the authorities is constantly growing, critical analysis of which is not possible because it contradicts the dominant ideology of imperial militarism and traditional values.

EACH SOCIOLOGIST has her/his own experience. For those who see the mission of sociology in serving the existing political regime and legitimizing it, the problem does not exist. But for those who think of sociology as a critical science which

questions common sense and ideological statements, a critical statement regarding existing social forms and the operation of social mechanisms can be recognized as a violation of the law, which can lead to administrative or even criminal charges.

Following feminist epistemology, I rely on the principles of situational knowledge, and before describing the situations that are problematic for my professional conscience, I briefly present my position in the professional field. I have been working in sociology for about forty years; I remember Soviet censorship, the practices of ideological control and purges in our profession. Luckily, in the 1990s the academic climate changed and opened up for academic freedoms. For 30 years since the early 1990s my professional life has been associated with a small non-state segment of the sociological field (private university, independent research center). I rose to the status of a professor, actively participated in international projects and the work of international sociological institutions. My main field of interest is gender studies, but I have also studied the history of Russian sociology, social movements and civic initiatives, and practices of care. My methodological commitment is qualitative research. I believe that the social relevance of sociology rests on the public openness of its data and the public discussion of research results. I live in Russia and have no intention of relocating. However, as my colleague said, I am no longer sure if I want to watch this terrible movie to the end.

THIS POSITION DETERMINES the degree of my sensitivity to attacks on the profession by the ideologists of the political regime in its current phase. For the past two years, together with several colleagues I have been keeping a professional collective diary. There I found a few stories that I would like to share.

And now, after an introduction that may be too lengthy, I will describe several problematic situations. I will limit myself to three stories that relate to different aspects of my professional life. I have to say that initially I thought about writing not only about myself, but also about my colleagues, sharing their moral dilemmas.



mas. However, I have decided that it was probably not good to give even that much limited publicity to what they privately shared with me. Even though all our secrets have already become commonplace in our work, something tells me that I need to limit the presentation to my own experience until the time comes.

1 THE STORY of the International Journal (IJ). For many years (since the very foundation of this IJ in 2010) I have been

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the managing editor and translator of its Russian version. The IJ is published in 17 languages and all its versions are available on the IJ website. This is a sociological digest, the content of which represents the development of sociology globally and in different countries. IJ is the flagship of public sociology. I sometimes

disagree with the authors of the journal as on a number of issues, their positions are more left-wing than mine. The journal is addressed to the general public, not only to a narrow sociological readership. For many years, I have been distributing IJ in various professional mailing lists to make it more accessible to our community, if not to all, then at least to the part with which I identify myself.

The special military operation called this individual professional project into question. In recent years, virtually every issue of IJ has contained articles criticizing the special military operation and its consequences for the lives of people and societies. The authors, of course, do not censor their statements, do not adjust their rhetoric to the format acceptable to the censored Russian media. They call the special military operation a full-fledged invasion, while the Russian political regime is categorized in different ways, but certainly not as a sovereign democracy. The analyses focus on the destructive consequences of the war; historical analogies in the policy of repression are given. The authors write what they think, without the fear of being accused of and receiving possible criminal charges “for spreading fakes”, terrorist propaganda, destructive ideologies, undesirable organizations, etc. My professional duty is to bring these publications to the Russian professional public. But how can I do this in such a way as not to let myself and my institution down? How to avoid bringing trouble on myself and my colleagues?

Every time I work on the next issue of IJ, I think anew about the question of whether it is worth continuing to participate in the project. Cowardly thoughts come to my mind. After all, if IJ wasn't published in Russian the loss would be quite small as the readership is not really big. In principle, I believe that a sociologist should read in foreign languages, and English has long become the lingua franca of professional international communication. Such cowardly thoughts about security suggest arguments in favor of refusing to participate in this international project. However, something prevents me from taking this step. I continue working but now this work is fraught with risks;

now I do not put information about it in my reports, I try to make it less visible to potential informers. So, a temporary decision has been made – not to close the risky project, but to reduce possible risks. What can be done?

One can take a pseudonym; it seems to be a normal thing to do. And every time when preparing an issue of IJ, I contemplate: should I anonymize my participation? Use a pseudonym or leave everything as it is? I still have the right to a name. Now this is the right to another name! But so far everything goes on as before; again, I rely “on chance”. Perhaps it will pass without any consequences, and nobody will “knock on the door”. I’ve become such a cowardly paranoid sociologist. At the same time, around me more and more often I hear stories about denunciations of people who criticize the authorities, the special military operation, the ideology of the conservative turn, the defamation of LGBT and feminism. And yet, something has changed in my work on IJ. After having consulted my colleagues, I have stopped the mass mailing of the magazine and only inform about the next issue and refer to the IJ website, where multilingual versions are published. The strategy of minimizing public visibility accompanies the project, but the anxiety remains.

2 THE SITUATION WITH media interviews and public performances. It can be described under the heading of the cancellation of public sociology or the cancellation of public expertise. This story is generic as it summarizes several similar situations of professional communication. And in order to clarify it, one needs to describe again how it was before, and only then one can explain what happens now. For many years, I have been speaking publicly in media about the problems of gender relations, intersectional inequality, sexuality, diversity of family forms, etc. Journalists were especially persistent during the holidays such as International Women’s Day and February 23, traditionally associated with men’s day in Russia. In the last 10–15 years, with the conservative turn in gender politics, interest in such issues has begun to grow. Sometimes

one needs to talk about maternity capital, then about new forms of fatherhood, then about soldiers’ mothers, then about LGBT rights, then about the feminization of poverty and civil marriages, and even about the trends of academic feminism and the women’s movement. In the Russian Federation, there are only a few experts on

“IT TURNS OUT THAT I AM NOT AT ALL BRAVE, BUT A CAUTIOUS SOCIOLOGICAL CREATURE.”

gender issues, and we were not deprived of media attention. We even seem to have learned how to popularize our knowledge without excessive vulgarization, acquired the skills of a selective attitude towards the media and learned to control what they publish based on what we tell them. It did not occur to us to censor our position. We were critical of the invention of traditional values and the repression of LGBTQ people, as well as the endless postponement of the adoption of the law on domestic violence. “Everything was forever, until it was no more”, using Alexey Yurchak’s famous words.

For us, this uncensored time ended in 2016 after the law banning LGBT propaganda was adopted. We began to put the 18+ marker on announcements of public events and on publications. My colleagues and I checked each other, fearing that we might have forgotten this marker, because its absence could have led to fines and then inspections that could destabilize the work of the institution (to put it mildly). It seemed like nothing special: We have placed the marker and are now free to discuss the problems of gender in our academic circles. However, the requests from media for interviews and comments continue to come. There are different media outlets, there are many of them, and often one cannot recognise by the name of the journalists which media they represent and how one’s statements will be used and presented. Can a statement

be qualified as undermining so called traditional values that have become ideological doxa, or as an expression of a destructive ideology? How many articles of the Criminal Code could already be applied to what we have said? Or maybe we gave an interview to an edition that has become a foreign agent, because their number is growing like mushrooms...

And just like that, I began to filter every contact with the media, to consult with colleagues about the degree of trust in the journalist and the media outlet, about whether or not to voice criticism of the ideology of traditional values and restrictions on reproductive rights, as well as about whether it was dangerous for me or for the institution. And then, in a friendly conversation, a very respected colleague begged me: “Please, do not shine. We must think not only about our conscience and our ambition, but also about preserving our institution, our students; we have a responsibility not only for ourselves, but also a higher one.” I answered that I live quieter than water, lower than the grass, I no longer go to the banned Facebook and do not use Instagram. And the sages say, “We ask you, think a few times about whether it is worth speaking out on sensitive topics, not distorting your soul”. And to lie in public means to spoil your reputation.

THE DECISION NOT to speak up is coming under increased pressure and threats as the number of repressive laws controlling educational outreach in the social sciences grows. In this regard, the Presidential Decree on Traditional Values of November 9, 2022, (No. 89) was very important. In general, I am not so attentive to the official discourse. But my colleagues drew my attention to this document and told me that in state sociological institutions they have to restructure their educational programs in order to include traditional values and the fight against terrorist and destructive ideologies. Then I decided to take a simple path and stop giving public interviews for domestic and foreign media: Because we cannot predict what consequences our words will have. There is a high degree of probability that it, our word, will lead to denunciation

and check-ups. Hence, “Stay silent, out of sight and hide your feelings and your dreams inside”. I knew these words of Tyutchev from earlier times, but it did not occur to me that they were about our profession. I thought that it was about distrust, about the difficulties of communication between people.

Above, I have already described the state of asphyxia or suffocation of public sociology in the current Russian context. Although there are still colleagues who do not break their connection with the public world of the media, for me this world is already hostile and dangerous. And it turns out that I am not at all brave, but a cautious sociological creature.

3 I WILL NOW OFFER the reader the third and last story. The internal censor is turned on and is gaining momentum. This internal censor convinces me that it is necessary to divide situations of professional communication into risky and safe ones. At the same time, the boundaries between these categories are porous and the qualifications are unreliable and temporal. This skill of distinguishing between friends and foes has not been mastered by every Russian sociologist. Young sociologists acquire these skills at unprecedented speed, while the veterans of sociology who still remember Soviet times find it easier to restore the half-forgotten skills of juggling with concepts, polysemy, the significance of omissions, and Aesopian language. My example comes from the field of gender studies.

Since the late 1990s, my university has been running a program of gender studies. We have implemented a number of projects focused on various aspects of the Russian gender order, regularly held extracurricular schools of gender education and professional development, and supported networks of gender researchers. Gradually, we stopped announcing our professional activities so as not to attract unwanted adverse attention. Then the administration of higher educational institutions asked us to take a break from organizing gender schools. A break is only temporary, it's not at all scary! In fact, we ourselves excluded some of the topics from the curriculum for security

reasons (for example the issues of LGBTQ-studies.)

OVER THE PAST TWO OR three years, there has been such a smooth, not at all abrupt, shift away from gender at our faculty, while gender used to be one of the key features of our department. The new track of the master's program is planned to include an elective on gender; however, the course title has not yet been determined. One possible version of the title is “Some aspects of social differentia-

“ONE POSSIBLE SCENARIO FOR COPING WITH THE SITUATION IS TO INVEST IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF INFORMAL PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS ACROSS INSTITUTIONAL BOUNDARIES.”

tion”. My colleagues are trying to disguise gender issues, trying to fit the names of gender events into the ideological mainstream of *cultural heritage* and *inspiring traditions*. Even though networks of like-minded individuals still function, the conferences and titles of academic presentations are formulated so abstractly and so strangely that only by the composition of the participants can one guess that the issues of gender and academic feminism will be discussed during these events. The politics of naming occupies an important place in academic activities. A name that is neutral or ideologically consistent with the spirit of the traditional values is designed to implement a protective camouflage function. We voluntarily change the presentation of ourselves, thereby creating, as it seems to us, the impression of loyalty. At the same time, the issues of gender imbalance, inequality, and even

sexual violence remain accessible for critical reflection. Meanwhile, some colleagues refuse to disguise themselves and continue to use the terms *gender regime*, *gender studies*, trying to keep calm and go on with their professional commitment.

How can we compensate for the stings of professional conscience and the inevitable moral costs of self-censorship? One possible scenario for coping with the situation is to invest in the construction of informal professional networks across institutional boundaries. The time has come to distinguish between different modes of sociological work – formal and informal. Today we participate in the formation of informal sociological get-togethers and launch initiative projects that are not subject to censorship. Informal sociology – invisible and unaccountable – grows in the folds of official state sociology.

THE PRACTICES of informal sociology today remind me of the legendary late Soviet seminars of Levada, meetings of sociologists in Kääriku, discussion groups on the classics of sociology, closed club meetings, oral sociology for small circles of the like-minded. The joys of solidarity of the chosen and the risks of exposure. But today's practices are more diverse and elaborated because the global web and private channels on social media create new opportunities for communication. Of course, informal sociological practices remain invisible and unrecognized in the world of institutionalized subaltern sociology, but I hope that this will not last long. ❌

Supporting the students

by V.G.

ON FEBRUARY 24, 2022, I woke up early in the morning and the first thing I did was to open Telegram, where all channels and chats were filled with messages about the start of the war. A chronicle of the first hours [of war] at that time was already appearing. At 13.30, according to the schedule, I had online classes with students from one regional university. According to the plan, we were supposed to talk about perestroika or something like that. But I could not pretend that nothing had happened, and during the whole class we talked about the war that had just started. At that time, the students were still almost unaware of what was going on and did not believe in the catastrophe that was unrolling. And I apologized for the fact that our generation could not prevent this war, and that now they will have to clean all this mess up.

The same situation repeated the next day with students of a St. Petersburg university: one class was spent on conversations with students talking about their feelings, thoughts, and emotions. Then it turned out that one student had a brother near Kharkiv as part of the Russian army at that exact moment, while another girl had an uncle in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. It was hard to listen to them; I only said that I hoped that their relatives would survive. The classes resembled group therapy sessions. I was grateful to the students for trusting me, although sometimes I wondered whether it was the right thing to do. I had far fewer doubts and more often than not I believed that the reality could not be ignored and that it was necessary to talk to students.

MARCH 2022. We met with colleagues from a St. Petersburg university online (at the time, Covid-19 was raging again, and in mid-February we were again transferred to distance-learning mode). For the first time, everyone was had their cameras on. We discussed what to do now, how to teach students. I had a question about

a course in political science in the CIS countries, where I was supposed to give a lecture and arrange a seminar on Ukraine. I was wondering how to do it in those circumstances. What moral right did I have to discuss political processes in a country that was being bombed in my name?

I agreed with the dean that I would not give those classes, while I would give points for the seminar to students automatically and at the end of the course, we would talk about Ukraine somehow, if there were a request (from students). And so it happened. Two years later, in 2024, when I started teaching the course again, I still could not give the seminar, but I gave the lecture according to the plan. It was

“THE ETERNAL DILEMMA: HOW TO GIVE CLASSES, HOW TO SPEAK IN THE CLASSROOM. SHOULD WE SAY ‘WAR’?”

very hard. However, now it seems it was necessary. Students ask a lot of questions about the events of 2014, so I have to talk a lot about it. It’s good that many journalistic investigations and research about the annexation, the outbreak of hostilities in the Donbas, as well as the tragedy in Odesa in May 2014, have already been published. I explain everything to students; I want them to stop believing propaganda.

MAY 2022. There was a lot of turbulence at the department; a lot of people were going to leave. Like many others, I was faced with a choice: leaving looks like a beautiful political gesture and is quite consistent with my will – working in the state academy is morally difficult. On the other hand, I feel responsible for my students. This is not about my irreplaceability; this is about the fact that I can support them, I can save

them at least a little from propaganda by talking about real science. My courses can help them find some kind of support.

I remember that in April 2022 I returned after a week-long vacation. At the very first class the 3rd year students asked why teachers had left (and by that time about ten people had left the department). The following dialogue took place:

Me: [It was because of] the anti-war petition of political scientists.

Students: But you have signed it too.

Me: Yes.

Students: Will you leave too? This is a betrayal.

Me: My contract expires in the summer. I submitted documents for the review (the procedure was launched in early February). So, if I am passed through the review, I will stay.

This phrase about betrayal stuck in my head for a long time. Of course, on their part, it was emotional and partly manipulation. But for me, these emotions were understandable. I myself sometimes thought in those terms: I can’t leave them when it’s already hard for them, and they’ve also been robbed of their future. However, I do not want to be disingenuous: I had nowhere to go, and I had and still have a lot of responsibility; but moral arguments also turned out to be important for me at some point.

The eternal dilemma: how to give classes, how to speak in the classroom. Should we say “war”? Or “a special military operation”? The current events? I have developed the following scheme: with students with whom I have been working for a long time and whom I trust, I say everything directly. With new students, I say “an armed conflict or the so-called special military operation” until I understand who is sitting in front of me.

ON SEPTEMBER 21, 2022, the military mobilization began. I usually had classes on Wednesdays. That time it was an offline

class. There were a lot of girls in the group and they entered the classroom with tears in their eyes. Again, this class was devoted to conversations about the current situation and what can be done. At that time, I was involved in a volunteer project that helped men to leave the country to avoid military mobilization. I offered my help to the students, although no one turned up.

Some students left the country for a while because of the mobilization, so a lot of missed classes have been accumulated. I had to come up with additional assignments for them apart from the syllabus so that they could finish the course. Previously, I would have followed the rules more strictly, but then it was important for me to support the students. Although later it turned out that some of them were in St. Petersburg and just skipped classes.

At the same time, during the mobilization, I decided for myself (and so did other colleagues) to turn a blind eye to everything and give minimum points to boys so that they are not expelled from the university and they are not mobilized into the army. There was one particularly illustrative case: a student who, in principle, did not attend any classes and always had to go for re-examination. At the beginning of October 2022, there was another re-examination on two subjects, for which he was clearly very, very poorly prepared. In the previous life, he would not have passed it. That time though, my colleagues and I, who were part of the re-examination commission, simply let him pass, without asking any special questions. So he made it to the fourth year at university and successfully graduated, of course, without even having attended classes.

IN THE FALL OF 2022 AND SPRING 2023, some students started to miss classes for another reason. They said that they had to visit relatives (usually fathers) in military hospitals. How should I deal with them? I had only one such student, but she sent me her extra-curricula texts for the missed seminars. What would I have done if she hadn't?

I also think about the so-called "quota admitted students" or "tselevik" [usually

admitted on the basis of special quotas, for example, quotas for children who have suffered from military conflicts or children whose parents died in military conflicts – editor's note]: it turned out that they mainly come from the law enforcement agencies. That given I do not count the relatives of combatants. They all have quotas and bonuses when they apply to study at higher educational institutions. This also comes with a quite a specific world view. I already feel the tension in the audience, although I haven't worked with them much yet.

And what to do with students who, on the contrary: go to Donbass with Tsargrad, are proud of their acquaintance with Kiriyenko and Malafeev, talk about how they threw in counterfeit ballots during the elections? When it comes to the counterfeit ballots, the situation is rather clear for me – I say that this is a crime. What about other things?

I tell some students that they should not be proud of such acquaintances, that they should not spoil their karma. And I emphasize that I do not sympathize with their bravado and that trips to the occupied territories seem to me unacceptable. These conversations take place mainly between classes, where I don't seem to be quite in the position of their teacher (although, of course, this is somewhat deviant, as I still hold some kind of authority).

IN THE WINTER OF 2023, the head of one department asked me to take on a consulting project. I participated in its development back in 2021 as a member of the team that worked at the department. All team members left the institute and refused to cooperate in any form. I consider this position to be very correct and principled. I reproached myself very much for continuing to work at the institute. In the end, I took the project anyway. There was no politics (and there was not much science either). I know the methodology very well, the whole process has already been debugged. I could not bear to explain it to someone else and then control the whole process. It is the worst thing for

me. But I caught myself not immediately telling my colleagues (and close friends), with whom I had done this in 2021, that I have got involved again. I was torn between on the one side the feeling that I was compromising and kind of legitimizing the war by continuing that work, and on the other by the fact that I, on the contrary, still could do my work without betraying myself. It is important for me that I work both in the project and in the classroom just as I worked before [adhering to the same principles – editor's note].

IN 2022, we did a study, the research application for which was written in the pre-war 2021. After the outbreak of the war, the question rose whether it was appropriate to study the specifics of the social politics in a region. The obligations to finish it were tough. We left with a colleague for the field trip. There were a lot of interviews, and in each of them the informants spoke about the deterioration of the situation after the start of the war, as a rule, using such formulations as "in the current situation", "deterioration of the geopolitical situation", etc. We wrote an excellent report, where we, of course, showed all empirically gathered results. As a result, our excellent report was not allowed to be published in the public domain (as it was originally planned in the research application), and was stamped "For official use only". In the end, some nonsense was published as a result of the project (although some of the project participants were extremely pleased with this). At that time, I was not even very upset; however later I began to think that we had lost very important evidence of the era. I have the transcripts of the interviews. Can I use them for other purposes? I always thought not. Now I began to doubt. ❌

To speak or not to speak

The mere act of choosing a pseudonym reveals one of the moral dilemmas – to speak or not to speak, and if to speak, is it safe to speak under one’s own name? – described in this collection of essays. In the cases mentioned in the publication, the very fear of prosecution plays a role when it comes to the choice of speaking or not speaking in public, or speaking undercover.

Two laws – article 30.3.3 of the Administrative Code “Public actions aimed at discrediting the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation and its citizens, maintain international peace and security”, and article 207.3 of the Criminal Code: “Public dissemination of knowingly false information about the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation” – were introduced in March 2022 and de facto activated wartime censorship, as anyone accused of breaching these two laws can be charged 50 000 rubles (500 euros), or either 5 million rubles (50 000 euros) or up to 15 years of imprisonment respectively.

THE INTRODUCTION of these laws has led to the significant crippling of the public sphere, with some scholars having stopped expressing their dissent and some having chosen indirect strategies of protest.¹

These strategies include both the use of double-speak and a wait-and-see attitude towards anyone a scholar speaks to. Such a strategy is valid in both research and teaching activity, as reflected in the autobiographical stories of our authors. The choice of wording is highly dependent on the context and the grade of publicity; it can even vary from time to time in the same context “as one never knows” what the outcome of the conversation or a publication would be. At that, it might be easier to call *war* a *war* in a familiar, safe environment, where all participants are *verified* and *trusted*, such as student groups a lecturer has previously known. Meanwhile, when it comes to an unknown audience, a speaker needs first

to recognize whether there are friends or foes in the room by using a strategy of *podmivanie* or *winking*, i.e. an attempt to recognize whether the audience shares the same political and ideological views by testing certain cultural codes and then studying the reactions. For example, one could mention a famous singer now banned in Russia and wait for the audience’s response – if the audience supports the singer, then the next step in communication can be taken.

IN GENERAL, speaking openly in public inside Russia becomes very difficult. People have lost their *right to language* as the language is being corrupted and appropriated by the state ideological apparatus. As a result one has to use double-speak or Aesopian language, whereby one says one thing, but in fact means something else. This is true not only for academics, but also civil society activists and cultural workers. People have to invent a new language to talk about things: the *war* is called *that situation* or *tragedy*, while *political repressions* are substituted with *uncertainty*.

Those familiar with the Soviet context say that the use of language is very similar to Soviet times with its so-called *public muteness syndrome*, double-speak and kitchen-talk, when all important debates have entered the private realm of kitchens.² Similar to the Soviet period, people

have to constantly monitor their use of language and fear to say something that could have grave consequences for their lives.³

Those who express themselves openly in writing have to manipulate their identity by using pseudonyms. So, the right to language is closely connected to *the right to a name*. Giving names gives the right to be, so when one is forced not to use her own name, she somehow disappears as if she does not have the right to be. For a researcher’s *name* is a social capital needed to be able to apply for research funding and university jobs, speaking at academic conferences and consulting policy-makers. Pseudonyms complicate an already complex situation for scholars in Russia. On the one hand, pseudonyms are intended to protect the identity of a scholar from political repression or being fired, but on the other hand, they annul all the work that had been done years before and in years to come. Moreover, anonymity is not a panacea; it gives one only a certain degree of protection as people can be easily recognized as soon as the context they are talking about becomes more or less personalized. Therefore publishing research becomes a dangerous affair. That is why some scholars choose not to publish research at all and instead hide it somewhere safe for a better day.

AS IT CAN BE seen from our authors’ texts, all of them continue doing research in one way or the other: working extra hours and not being paid for the research they do or researching on the margins of the funded projects. As the personal narratives show, some scholars have to stay at state universities as they pay salaries, but in order to compensate for such compromise they conduct research that is free of the state ideology.

Fear of losing income and not being able to continue working within the profession of a social researcher or lecturer is very real for social scientists in Russia. All texts in this collection raise a ques-



tion of duty and responsibility towards students, colleagues and the profession. What happens to students if every *decent and self-respecting scholar* decides to leave the country and pursue their academic career where such moral dilemmas are not even up for a discussion? Who is going to teach new generations of political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists if every *decent and self-respecting scholar* flees to the West? It is very easy to take a moral stance towards scholars inside Russia if one has a secure position at one of the best academic institutions in Europe or in the US. It hardly ever happens that we, scholars in the West, have to juggle such moral dilemmas, although there is a strong fear that one day we might also end up in a similar situation.

There is clearly no shortage of those in Russia who do not have such moral scruples as described by our authors and would willingly take over the academic positions of people who have left because of their moral principles or simply been fired. There are those who more or less eagerly support the cause of the state. But there are also young people who want to and need to get a quality education in social science and these are going to be the people who will stay and work in Russia in the future. Already at the very start of the war students of sociology and political science at the most respected higher educational institutions in the country expressed their fear that they would be abandoned by their teachers in the country, where there is a rapid ideologization and militarization of higher education. Another aspect mentioned in the texts of our authors is the researcher's duty towards an institution and her colleagues, bringing the issue of individual and collective responsibility into the discussion. As the texts in this collection show, our authors are often *called to their senses* by their colleagues who fear persecution. This collective pressure at the working place creates a double moral burden for Russian scholars who do not support the war and would like to express their position openly: it is difficult enough to speak up and it is even more difficult to be the reason for somebody else's misfortunes.

All these matters mentioned above

have resulted in any form of protest becoming invisible. Inside Russia, those who openly voice their protest against the politics of the state are prosecuted. The only way to keep a job is to stay under the radar. Meanwhile outside of Russia they are ostracized for not being vocal enough to count as open critics of the regime. Formal and informal bans on inviting Russian scholars working in Russia to the

“OUR AUTHORS ARE OFTEN CALLED TO THEIR SENSES BY THEIR COLLEAGUES WHO FEAR PERSECUTION.”

conferences or working in collaborative projects does not improve the situation. Even though some universities do not explicitly forbid their staff to work with Russian scholars as private persons, in practice it is rather difficult to accomplish as no funds can be transferred to Russia, which also has an effect on logistical issues as money can not be used to invite scholars from Russia to the conferences or meetings.

IT IS THE *spiral of silence* in action. The theory of spiral of silence postulates that an individual's perception of public opinion influences that individual's willingness to express their own opinion. If an individual perceives that her opinion might be in a minority, the willingness to stay silent will be higher.⁴ Scholars who do not support the politics of the regime end up in a certain *Catch-22 spiral of silence*. Given that it is difficult to measure public opinion during wartime (there has been a lot of discussion about different kinds of bias as well as the previously mentioned effects of the spiral of silence), it is hard to say what in fact is the dominant public opinion towards the war in Russia. In this kind of condition when it is hard to read the air, people and scholars are no exception. As the texts show, scholars in Russia opt for safe strategies of speaking

in public (including university classrooms and publications). At the same time, this invisibility of the scholars and their position creates an impression to the outside viewer that if the majority does not support the war, then at least the majority of scholars does not really care and is silently withdrawn from the current political agenda into *internal exile*. In fact, some of them may well be, but some of them are also not. Unfortunately, non-selective bans can hardly help one to see the picture fully, as the only voices that are being heard and become viral in social media are either ardent supporters of the war or academics who have been working in western academia for quite some time and can afford themselves a degree of resentment towards those *who remain*. But this is a different story that can be discussed some other time. ✖

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