Alexander Kalgin and Sergei Mashukov

Displaced Russian Academics. Networks, Markets, and Survival Strategies

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Displaced Russian Academics

Networks, Markets, and Survival Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the challenges faced by Russian émigré academics, particularly in the field of social sciences, as they attempt to integrate into new academic environments that operate on different constitutive principles. Using the core-periphery distinction, we analyse their struggle to move from the semi-periphery to the core of Western science. This research explores adaptation strategies employed to sustain academic careers in exile – what we call "academic survival". Drawing on economic sociology's distinction between markets and networks, we analyse how Russian academics navigate the more market-oriented Western academia, unlike their network-driven Russian academic environment. The study identifies two key survival strategies: reliance on strong and weak ties and community-based migration. While strong ties provide initial security and emotional support, weak ties facilitate access to new academic opportunities. Additionally, some academics have relied on collective migration strategies, forming tightly-knit academic units that facilitate mutual support and professional continuity.

1 INTRODUCTION

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, a large number of Russians, including academics, fled the country. While precise data is lacking, various sources indicate that a significant proportion of this group are academics (Zavadskaya 2023). For some, the motivation was the swift passage of repressive laws in early March 2022, creating a climate of fear for personal safety and freedom. Others left on moral grounds, horrified that their country was waging a war of aggression. For them, emigration became "a peculiar and costly form of protest", chosen because all other forms were prohibited (Rapoport 2024: 33). This wave of academic emigration is distinguished by a pronounced moral and protest component, setting it apart from previous waves driven primarily by economic and career motivations, as described by Naumova (2005). Unlike voluntary emigration, this academic emigration, like forced and abrupt emigration, hinders assimilation, leading to frustration and undermining scholars' academic careers (Axyonova et al. 2022; Smyslova 2024).

Social scientists immediately began to study the phenomenon of the Russian emigration, initiating projects to describe and analyse the trajectories and experiences of those who left (Kamalov et al. 2023; Krawatzek/Sasse 2024). Estimates range from a few hundred to over ten thousand scientists who have left Russia. Social scientists and journalists using ORCID data have concluded that there has been a significant increase in emigration since 2022, with up to 2'500 researchers estimated to have left the country (Levin 2024). Another source of data about the emigre community is the community-building project initiated by the Davis Centre of Harvard University. The coordinator of Scholars Without Borders (SWB), Alexander Abashkin (2024), conservatively estimates the number of emigrated academics to be between 8'000 and 12'000.

The Russian academic community is the largest[1] in the post-Soviet space and Eastern Europe (Huisman et al. 2022). Inheriting a huge part of the

1 The number of researchers in the Russian Federation in 2021 decreased by 2.4% to 662'700 people (Interfax Education 2022).

scientific infrastructure from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Russia has also dominated many scientific fields in the region, and for this reason, the emigration of Russian scientists is likely to have a major impact not only on Russia itself but also on other countries. Moreover, some analysts have identified emigrants of this wave as the most productive Western-oriented social scientists (Albitsky/Data Department 2024). Although the absolute number of emigrating academics may not be large in comparison with the total number of academics in Russia, their departure is highly significant due to their critical role in educating students and serving as a modernising force within society (Petrov 2024).

In recent years, academics in many parts of the world have faced forced migration (Axyonova et al. 2022). In that respect, this wave of Russian academic emigration could be compared to the Turkish case, triggered by the sweeping crackdown on the academic sector following the 2016 coup attempt, according to some estimates resulting in more than 6'000 academics being dismissed (Aktas et al. 2019; Sertdemir Özdemir 2021). Similarly, in Iran, academics face severe restrictions and threats, especially those in the social sciences and those with international connections, with arrests and imprisonments leading to a chilling effect on academic freedom (Butler 2007). Thus, the Russian emigration of scientists after 2022 fits into a more general trend of increasing numbers of at-risk academics fleeing war-torn countries. These academics are severely affected by forced emigration, particularly affecting their social networks and creating new challenges (Richter 2022).

Although existing quantitative studies estimate the scale of Russian emigration, they do not provide sufficient insight into how these academics adapt and survive in the new environment. In this paper, we examine the subjective experiences of researchers who use different resources and strategies to succeed in difficult circumstances to survive as academics. We define academic survival as the ability to maintain employment in the academy after emigration.

Russian academia has integrated some neoliberal and competitive principles, yet it primarily operates through informal networks rather than market mechanisms. Consequently, exiled Russian academics face significant challenges adapting to meritocratic, market-driven academic environments, requiring new strategies for professional integration and survival. For this reason, it is interesting to understand what these academics do to survive in a different academic environment. Given our research interests, focus, and expertise, we concentrated on social scientists. Our key **research question** is thus: What strategies and resources do social scientists mobilise to survive in the new academia based on different constitutive principles? To answer this question, we use qualitative research methodology based on semi-structured interviews with Russian émigré academics.

We draw on the distinction between markets and networks, a concept widely used in economics and economic sociology, to describe the Russian case of academic emigration, analysing how the combination of network and market strategies enables academics to adapt to new academic environments. This situation is, to a certain extent, a "moving target" as Russian academics continue to migrate and adapt to new circumstances.

Our study thus contributes to two research fields. First, there is a rich tradition of academic migration research, to which the Russian case can be an important addition. In comparison to other cases, academic emigration from Russia is not only large in scale, with thousands of researchers leaving the country, but also an example of, to a large extent, morally driven migration from a country that wages an aggressive war on an unprecedented scale. Second, drawing on discussions about

the role of networks and markets in adapting to new environments (Podolny/Page 1998), especially regarding the academic labour market (Richter 2022), we aim to contribute to a disciplinary field of economic sociology.

Beyond that, we would like to provoke a discussion about solidarity and meritocracy in the academic world. Modern academia is almost completely oriented towards individual performance and success and does not conceive of itself in terms of solidarity. The circumstances of Russian academics in exile vividly demonstrates the lack of solidarity-based measures in modern academia. Moving against the conservative and legitimising status quo position that "science normally is as it ought to be" (Fuller 2014: 20), we argue that lacking opportunities for unconditional support of scientists and collective emigration create the image of academia as a space for individual struggle where there is no space for solidarity. We believe that such a normative critique could be valuable for reimagining the academic world.

The paper is structured as follows: the Methodology section describes the qualitative research design, detailing sampling criteria, data collection through semi-structured interviews, and analysis methods. The Migration Vectors section applies the core-periphery framework to analyse the migration trajectories of exiled academics, highlighting the challenges they face in navigating global academic hierarchies and adapting to new environments. In the Networks and Markets in Academia section, the paper explores how the dynamics of network- and market-based academic systems influence the integration and survival strategies of displaced scholars. The Academic Survival Strategies section examines individual and community-based approaches to adaptation, emphasising the importance of strong and weak ties as well as collective efforts in adaptation to new academic settings. Finally, the concluding section, In Search of Academic Solidarity, critiques the meritocratic individualism pervasive in global academia and calls for fostering mechanisms that promote solidarity, especially in contexts of forced migration and collective displacement.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 RESEARCH DESIGN, SAMPLING, AND DATA COLLECTION

Research design – The interview guide focused on various aspects of academic migration, covering topics such as the respondent's background, physical relocation, integration into the host academic environment, and the role of social networks in facilitating their move. It also explored changes in academic freedom, research topics, financial and social status post-relocation. Apart from direct questions, the interview guide included projective methods such as free associations and metaphors. Respondents were asked to describe their academic community as one image metaphorically. They were given time to think about this metaphorical image and describe its meaning. The interview guide was piloted with 2 young Russian scholars from the author's personal contacts and refined before implementation. The questions of the guide were discussed in detail with these two participants and clarified based on their feedback.

Sampling – After the pilot was done, we published the announcements in Telegram channels, we used targeted sampling with specific criteria. The criteria were: 1) being related to academia prior to emigration (at least being enrolled into a PhD course or actively aspiring to enrol); and 2) having relocated after February 2022 from Russia to another country. Our interest was mainly in social sciences and humanities. Thus, we focused on representatives of these fields, even more so because their career trajectories are more comparable and, to a larger extent, linked to the national context.

Limitations – A note on potential limitations of such recruitment is in order. We may expect that in such Telegram channels, members self-select based on their "academic hardships". Those "high-fliers" who received lucrative offers and migrated to Western countries without major difficulties may not have the motivation to join such "community help" projects. Thus, we may expect, on average, to find academics with more problematic migration trajectories.

Data collection – The first author conducted fieldwork between February and March 2023, collecting 21 semi-structured interviews, each lasting between 30 minutes and an hour. Respondents were recruited by posting invitations on the Telegram channels of Russian emigrant communities. The information was distributed in Telegram channels of "The Arc" (*Kovcheg*) community-building project that supports Russian emigrants, and the Davis Centre at Harvard University and their SWB project. The SWB agreed to provide an opportunity to recruit displaced academics via their existing Telegram channel, which has over 800 subscribers worldwide.

Data analysis – All interviews were recorded and transcribed using transcription software Trint. The interview transcripts were coded using the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA using the concepts of the theoretical framework.

Data protection and ethical considerations – We did not save the personal information of participants. All files were labeled with numbers, and we avoided asking participants for their personal details during the interviews. Thus, identification of respondents is not possible from the data. Recordings were deleted once transcripts were completed.

2.2 PARTICIPANTS

Since the topic of politically motivated emigration is very sensitive, we attempted to anonymise the quotes so that the respondents could not be identified. This added layer of obscurity required us to remove most mentions of respondents' current location or academic discipline and any demographic data. However, we believe anonymity is the top priority in the current situation. We keep the reported details to a minimum.

Out of 21 participants, 10 were men and 11 women. Below is the list of participants with pseudonyms and academic fields (Table 1), and the number of participants by host country (Table 2).

Table 1: List of participants

N	Pseudonym	Field
1	Sergey	Sociology
2	Lida	Sociology
3	Andrey	Sociology
4	Maria	Sociology
5	Filipp	Sociology
6	Tatiana	Sociology
7	Alexey	Sociology
8	Alexander	Sociology
9	Valeria	Linguistics
10	Petr	Political science
11	Matvey	Demography
12	Inna	Psychology
13	Tamara	Political science
14	Roman	Physics
15	Vera	Psychology
16	Ivan	Sociology
17	Taisia	Sociology
18	Elena	Psychology
19	Valentina	Political science
20	Olga	Health Studies
21	Timofey	Psychology

Table 2: Number of participants by country

Host country	Number of participants
Germany	6
Israel	4
Kazakhstan	4
Armenia	1
Netherlands	1
Turkey	1
USA	1
UK	1
Denmark	1
Iceland	1

For most participants, the prospect of emigration was not seriously considered before Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The war brought this issue to the forefront unexpectedly, prompting many to reconsider their future options in light of the conflict. Therefore, we speak mostly of unplanned, abrupt academic emigration.

The group of emigrated Russian scholars form a rather distinct academic community. These are people from universities in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, oriented towards international Western social sciences. As a general rule, those who emigrated did not hold top administrative positions in university hierarchies and were not excessively burdened with a heavy load of administrative duties. This characteristic is in line with the typology of the likelihood of emigration suggested by Margarita Zavadskaya (2023). They were also academics with some level of academic capital; that is, they had some publications in international peer-reviewed journals. Some participants were either enrolled or aimed to enrol in PhD programmes from Western universities – even though they already had a PhD in sciences in Russia. Degrees from Western universities were seen as able to boost academic capital, as they essentially simplify academic emigration and often serve as a signal of legitimacy for university administrations.

3 MIGRATION VECTORS: SWIMMING AGAINST OR WITH THE CURRENT

For our analysis of the vectors of academic migration, we draw on the distinction of core and periphery in global academia, a concept stemming from the world-system theory of Immanuel Wallerstein (2011). Previous studies have focused on the stratification of the academic world using this distinction. The core is the mainstream science produced in Western liberal democracies, while periphery science occurs in countries outside the core, often detached from mainstream developments. The periphery is typically in a one-sided relationship with the core (Risse et al. 2022). Core journals cite each other and create the mainstream of the academic discipline. Peripheral journals usually cite the core journals but not vice versa. Critics of globalisation argue that English plays a dominant role, and a few oligopolies control scientific communication (Beigel et al. 2018). Russian scholars have long debated their country's position within the global academic hierarchy, recognising its ambiguous status between the core and periphery (Sokolov 2019). The global academic system creates a segmented and unequally structured field where international prestige is more difficult to attain for scholars in peripheral countries, exacerbating the division between internationalised and locally-focused researchers (Beigel 2014; Beigel et al. 2018). For this reason, the country of origin plays a crucial role in academic careers (Goastellec/Pekari 2013).

Exiled academics can move into peripheral, semi-peripheral, or core academia. This movement could be metaphorically described as swimming against or with the current. Entering core academia from the periphery is usually complicated and associated with a potential loss of status and a slowdown of academic career progression. On the other hand, moving between peripheral countries or countries further removed from the core may result in gaining academic status within a

particular national system and a comparable or even higher academic position.[2] Olga Kurek-Ochmańska and Krzysztof Luczaj (2021) examine the motivations and challenges faced by Western academics who migrate from core academic centres to the Polish semi-periphery, demonstrating that this migration represents an "upstream" mobility.

In the core-periphery framework, Russia is characterised as a semi-peripheral country. Thus, typically, Russian emigre researchers find it harder to sell themselves in Western markets and easier in peripheral markets. One respondent had a large network in Central Asia. He initially emigrated to Germany but could not find a long-term position there and later migrated to Kazakhstan. For him, the decisive criterion was the uncertainty of the Western academic market and having no long-term position: "I'm getting a little tired of the uncertainty" (Interview 11).[3] In addition to providing a long-term position, the university in Kazakhstan offered higher pay.

Researchers from peripheral and semi-peripheral countries face similar barriers of distrust and scepticism concerning their qualifications when trying to enter core academia. This lack of trust arises because their skills are not easily verifiable and comparable to those of the core academia. A former head of a laboratory at a top Russian university summarised her experience as follows:

> We are not very clear to them. And as if there is no difference between a person from Russia and a person from Rwanda [...]. Russia is such a slightly wild country for them where they don't know how students are taught at universities (Interview 15).[4]

The size of the academic market may also matter in shaping the individual strategies of academics. The Russian academic market is huge, and many scholars had little incentive to enter academic markets in other countries before the war. In stark contrast, Estonia's academic market is much smaller, contributing to the fact that many Estonian academics are oriented towards the international academic market, understanding this as a necessary condition for survival (Lovakov/Yudkevich 2021).

Despite the existence of many internationalised Western-oriented universities in Russia (Zavadskaya/Gerber 2023) and scholars deeply rooted in international research, the majority of Russian scholars have been oriented toward the domestic academic market. As a result, in a situation where a need emerged to market themselves to Western academia, it has proven difficult. Scholars with access to international networks had a significant advantage.

A special case of emigration is collective migration. In markets dominated by open competition, such as Western academia, integrating a full academic unit is difficult due to hiring regulations and competition with local candidates. Therefore, collective migration from Russia to Western academia is unlikely but more plausible in peripheral countries where collective downshifting provides safety and continued academic work outside Russian censorship.

3.1 NETWORKS AND MARKETS IN THE ACADEMIC WORLD

We also can distinguish academic environments by how they determine academic success. We use the optic of economic sociology to distinguish between markets and networks as key principles that determine how the academic ecosystem functions. Some systems strongly favour market logic over networks. Individuals in such systems constantly apply for different vacancies, send

2 It is worth emphasising, however, that within peripheral academic worlds, the distinction between periphery and core is also reproduced like fractals (Abbott 2001).

3 Interview 11 with Matvey, interview by Kalgin, Alexander (25 February 2023).

4 Interview 15 with Vera, interview by Kalgin, Alexander (26 February 2023).

hundreds of resumes to various institutions, and compete on an equal basis for academic recognition. In contrast, other systems are based on the network principle. Individuals in such academic environments mostly rely on their networks to find jobs and build careers. Certainly, in every academic environment, both market and network mechanisms are present to varying degrees. However, in almost every system, it is possible to identify a predominant constitutive logic.

In the US and, to a lesser extent, in Europe, the academic ecologies operate on a market-based principle, where scholars freely move between institutions and their achievements are reassessed with each job change. In contrast, many post-Soviet countries rely on networks for recruitment, where hiring is often based on connections rather than a transparent, merit-based process. Studies on the academic environment in Russia have constantly highlighted that networks play a central role in shaping how academia operates. One gets hired not via a transparent, free market procedure but via a network of connections and mutual acquaintances (Sokolov et al. 2015).

What happens when academics from a system with one principle of the organisation of the academic world migrate to a system with a different logic? A metaphor may be useful. Migrating from one academic environment to another is similar to transplanting an organ from one organism to another. If tissues are fundamentally different, the organ will be rejected by the receiving organism. Similarly, if an academic or an academic collective received their recognition based on one constitutive principle, they may not easily be able to convert it to a similar level of recognition in another system.

4 ACADEMIC SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

We can identify many factors, drawn from various theoretical traditions, that can help explain the success of academic survival: networks and personal ties (drawing on the tradition of Granovetter 1983), language as symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986), "emotional energy" (Collins 2014) generated by belonging, and socialising in a "thought collective" (Fleck 2012).

For academics from some Russian universities, emigration was easier than for others. Since a selected few Russian universities, such as the Higher School of Economics and the European University at Saint Petersburg, were involved in international collaborations before the full-scale invasion, academics at these institutions gained experience collaborating with Western colleagues (Zavadskaya/Gerber 2023). The experience of such collaborations made relocation much easier by building on existing ties.

The different strategies of emigrated academics differ depending on their social and academic capital at the time of emigration. The host country's academic market may determine the importance of a particular type of capital. For example, the Russian language may be a substantial asset when emigrating to Central Asian countries, but it is of lesser value when emigrating to Germany or Canada.

Below, we focus on two strategies of academic emigration: one based on the social ties of individuals and the other drawing on the support of academic communities.

4.1 STRATEGY ONE: STRONG TIES FOR SURVIVAL, WEAK TIES FOR GROWTH

The distinction between strong and weak ties stems from the seminal work of Mark Granovetter (1983). **Strong ties** are close, emotionally intense

relationships, like those with family or close friends, offering trust and support but limited diversity in information. In contrast, **weak ties** are looser connections with acquaintances, characterised by infrequent interaction and lower emotional involvement. Despite their superficiality, weak ties are crucial for accessing new ideas, opportunities, and resources by bridging otherwise disconnected social groups. Granovetter (1983) argues that weak ties often play a greater role than strong ties in fostering innovation, mobility, and societal advancement.

Weak and strong ties play a crucial role in unplanned migration, each serving different functions for displaced academics. Strong ties typically consist of close personal and professional relationships and provide immediate support and a sense of security, while weak ties – more casual connections – can open doors to new opportunities in the academic field.

One respondent shared his story of migration to a Central Asian country, in which his academic supervisor played the major role of providing shelter and travel advice. This strong tie ensured his basic needs were met during the difficult early stages of migration. After, he was able to secure an academic position in Kazakhstan via weak ties but continued to rely on his strong ties in Russia for income, which is necessary for survival and freedom to engage in "venture" projects:

> In general, I still thought that the academy in Russia works on connections, that is, not on reputation or market mechanisms, right? So, in general, you need to build up connections. I engaged in countless projects. As a result, I have a rather large tangle of connections on which I rely. The strong ties were more important for feeling security and that I could get into ventures (Interview 8).[5]

Another respondent told about her unplanned migration to a Middle Eastern country in which her Russian close ties played a major role:

> I was going to nowhere. I had just been to this city once before as a tourist for three days. So it was not planned, this emigration. When I arrived, my professors and colleagues in Russia helped me find connections here. And later on, when I started working here, everything developed. That is to say, I was already making connections here (Interview 13).[6]

These cases highlight the dual importance of both strong and weak ties in navigating unplanned academic migration. Together, these networks provide a pathway for academic migrants to adapt and function in unfamiliar academic environments.

4.2 STRATEGY TWO: COMMUNITY-BASED MIGRATION

A distinction between weak and strong ties, however insightful, does not capture all the dimensions and configurations of emigration and displacement. Rather than relying on professional or personal networks alone, the mutual support strategy highlights how a community – often organised around a shared cause or project – can provide emotional, financial, and logistical assistance to ease the migration and integration experience.

A respondent who does not yet consider herself an academic and is currently searching for PhD opportunities has highlighted the role of their activist community in relocation. As a member of an activist project, she and many fellow members relocated together, helping each other in the new country, exemplifying how migrants often rely on mutual assistance – whether emotional or financial – to reinforce social ties and ease integration.

5 Interview 8 with Alexander, interview by Kalgin, Alexander (24 February 2023).

6 Interview 13 with Tamara, interview by Kalgin, Alexander (26 February 2023).

> My relocation was neither individual nor collective. It was a bit of both. I decided to emigrate individually. I went away with a friend. We organised the move together. Many of my colleagues and friends left simultaneously, and we met up as a large group almost immediately. We lived together for a while and supported each other. But it was not an academic acquaintance but more about our activist project. On the other hand, when I was settled, I helped a few people coming here (Interview 19).[7]

One respondent called their collective "the pack" [of wolves]. This small collective has grown from a friendly community into an academic unit. They wrote and submitted grant applications together and have migrated to a European country:

> We call ourselves the pack. There were four of us; we would meet for seminars in the auditorium of our university. Afterwards, we would all go to a bar together. Afterwards, we would all go to someone's house to watch a film, wake up cheerfully, and do the seminar again. It was originally a friendly community that migrated into the academic world (Interview 4).[8]

The success of this group was not solely based on their academic abilities but also on the micro-rituals that sustained their emotional energy and cohesion (Collins 2014). Meeting regularly for seminars, going to bars, and socialising informally after academic discussions were not just social activities but the key to maintaining the emotional and intellectual "fuel" necessary for their survival and academic success. These informal gatherings – repeated in a structured yet relaxed manner – helped solidify trust and foster collaboration within the group. They were more than just academic peers; they became a community that shared both personal and professional growth.

Another metaphor has been invoked by several respondents who emigrated together. Theirs was a metaphor for a "children's camp" used by four respondents who attended a stipend programme together. These four respondents attended the stipend programme for young scholars abroad, organised soon after the outbreak of the invasion of Ukraine. They later entered Master's or PhD programmes in various institutions in the West. This may be considered the closest case to collective migration in our study. They spent four months together socialising, working on their project proposals, and finding opportunities for further academic migration.

> [...] it was an outdoor children's camp. We had a dormitory and a garden; we would get together in the garden every evening, drink beer, and go to the university, which was across the street, in the afternoon. That's the community (Interview 2).[9]

In other cases, collectives of exiled academics emerged in the process of migration. Another respondent referred to his collective of six people as "a mechanism". This collective emerged after his emigration and was dispersed across several countries, communicating entirely online. The work of this small collective is noticeable in the Russian emigre community; they organised a series of roundtables and conferences, bringing together scholars of Russian emigration.

> For me, our collective is a mechanism. And these cogs, which are turning, each drive the other, and this metaphor has a twofold meaning. On the one hand, it really is a case where everyone moves others and drives each other a bit. And on the other hand, everyone works together to produce a unified result (Interview 7).[10]

Community-based migration goes beyond the traditional framework of weak and strong ties by

7 Interview 19 with Valentina, interview by Kalgin, Alexander (28 February 2023).

8 Interview 4 with Maria, interview by Kalgin, Alexander (23 February 2023).

9 Interview 2 with Lida, interview by Kalgin, Alexander (21 February 2023).

10 Interview 7 with Alexey, interview by Kalgin, Alexander (24 February2023).

emphasising the importance of collective effort and mutual support. A shared sense of community and mission binds the members together, and they move as a unit, reinforcing social resources and benefitting all participants. This collective strategy offers not just survival but a sense of belonging and shared purpose in migration.

However, collective emigration, already a challenging endeavour, becomes even more difficult within highly competitive academic environments. One of our participants saw collective relocation as less feasible in the US than in Europe due to a more competitive market. Even if, hypothetically, a laboratory is given to a Russian professor, they would be expected to recruit from the local and international academic market and would not be able to bring their colleagues from Russia:

> Well, the problem may be that when you're given a lab in the States, you have much more access to a much larger pool of people and a more competitive market. So, just taking people from Russia, I'm not sure that's a cool strategy (Interview 21).[11]

Another important aspect of force migration is the need to sacrifice one's standard of living, which often was mentioned by the participants. It is as if a certain trade-off between academic and economic capital needs to be made. In order to ensure academic survival in exile, one needs to be prepared to sacrifice one's standard of living:

> For half a year, I lived below the poverty line. I entered this Master's program even though I already had a Master's degree; my stipend was 500 euros a month, out of which I had to pay 250 euros in bills. And only half a year later, I was able to win a grant that would make my life much easier (Interview 1).[12]

11 Interview 21 with Timofey, interview by Kalgin, Alexander (28 February 2023).

12 Interview 1 with Sergey, interview by Kalgin, Alexander (21 February 2023).

5 AFTERWORD: IN SEARCH OF ACADEMIC SOLIDARITY

In modern global academia, recognition and success are predominantly defined by individual performance metrics – such as the number of publications, their impact, and the prestige of the journals where they appear. This meritocratic system ostensibly rewards excellence and innovation but often comes at the expense of deeper communal ties intrinsic to the traditional sense of academia as "a corporation", *universitas*, meaning the union of equals united by the pursuit of knowledge. The traditional notion has been eroded in favour of hyper-individualised competition.

This erosion of solidarity is particularly acute in times of crisis, such as war, political repression, or crackdowns on academic freedom. For displaced scholars, the absence of robust support mechanisms underscores the vulnerabilities inherent in a system that prioritises individual merit over collective support. While individual excellence is celebrated, it is rarely enough to ensure academic survival in exile, especially when entire networks and institutional ties are abruptly severed.

International academic support organisations may find themselves in a precarious position: their values dictate the support of solidarity, yet their resources must be allocated based on individual merit. It is not sufficient to be at risk; one must also be a prolific academic to receive support. This implicit requirement creates a precarious situation for academics who, for whatever reason, cannot compete in the "publish or perish" game.

The plight of Russian academics displaced by the invasion of Ukraine exemplifies this dynamic. The competitive, market-driven nature of Western academia often reduces displaced scholars to individual "applicants", disconnected from their broader intellectual and professional networks.

This atomisation undermines the collective capacity of academic communities to respond to crises as unified bodies.

What is missing is an infrastructure of solidarity that transcends the logic of competition. The ability to relocate academic collectives, not just individuals, would allow displaced scholars to retain the intellectual synergies and emotional support that come with being part of a functioning academic unit. Such initiatives would not only benefit the displaced but also enrich the host institutions by integrating cohesive, ready-made teams capable of contributing immediately to research and teaching.

Ultimately, it is about the difference between the "cherry-picking" approach, that is, hiring individuals who are qualified enough and could probably migrate without additional support, and an approach based on academic solidarity coupled with a belief in the value of social ties.

Efforts to rethink academia should consider addressing the lack of solidarity within the current system. Moving beyond an individualistic focus requires establishing mechanisms to support collective initiatives. These mechanisms could include funding programmes for relocating academic groups, encouraging long-term collaborative networks, or rebuilding intellectual communities in exile. Such measures would help academia reconnect with its historical role as a collective enterprise, a "corporation", fostering the shared pursuit of knowledge and mutual support.

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