

*Iwona Dadej*

Institute of History, Polish Academy of Sciences (Warsaw, Poland)

**THE GENDER ORDER AND THE DISASSEMBLING  
SHE-PROTAGONISTS: POLISH ACADEMIC CULTURE  
IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY  
AS AN ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE**

**Abstract**

The article deals with Polish academic culture and the gender order prevalent therein in the former half of the twentieth century. The protagonists are a group of women who worked, in the circumstances of their time, on their postdoctoral (*habilitation*) theses. In my perception, this was the group that initiated the processes of change in the gender relations in the academic environment. The struggle for recognition in the world of science is exemplarily shown on the basis of the professional trajectories of Helena Polaczkówna and Helena Willmann-Grabowska.

**Keywords:** Polish female scientists, history of gender and science, female *venia legendi* in Poland, Helena Polaczkówna, Helena Willmann-Grabowska

The gallant heart would thither race,  
all its strength and courage brace  
for glorious deeds surpassing bold,  
but bleak reality croaks 'Hold!'<sup>1</sup>

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When doing a search at the archive of the Stefan Batory University [Polish: Uniwersytet Stefana Batorego, hereinafter: USB] in Vilnius for the purpose of my project,<sup>2</sup> I found an interesting document dated

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from *Wesele*, a classic 1901 play by Stanisław Wyspiański; quoted after the English version: *The Wedding*, transl. by Noel Clark, with an introduction by Jerzy Peterkiewicz (London, 1998<sup>1</sup>, 2010<sup>2</sup>, 2012<sup>3</sup>).

<sup>2</sup> This text has been completed as part of the project 'Gender Order in Polish Science 1890–1952', under the National Science Centre (NCN) programme Fuga No. 2016/20/S/HS3/00337.

1920, which referred to the first days of the then-newly founded University, being a list of its movable properties, numbering several hundred items.<sup>3</sup> The list features scientific instruments as well as implements indispensable to keep the area tidy and do maintenance or repair works in university buildings (brooms, buckets, hammers). Some of the movables are strictly related to the private sphere of the scientific staff and the usable, outright existential, facet of the functioning of science. Listed are also items of ‘men’s underwear’, including shirts (206 pieces), trousers buckles (46), and 199 pairs of long underwear allocated among the Professors and the Rector. Being an imminent part of the University’s movable property, men’s underwear deserved being meticulously recorded in the registers. Hence, the shirts, thermal underwear, and dressing gowns as distinctions of (intimate or ‘domesticated’) masculinity became part of the academic world. For the academic milieu of Wilno, cultural masculinity constituted a universal pattern, shaping and strengthening the gender order. The document I have found shows moreover how, and in what perspectives, university and academia – the workplaces and places where knowledge is produced – may be defined: they namely form an intellectual space where networks of scientific interconnections: thought collectives, social networks, family ties and dependencies; also, a physical and symbolic space where knowledge, science and skills are generated and distributed, and a workplace and space of duties related to access to power and its wielding. University is, moreover, the place where the prevalent order of gender is most frequently solidified, and less frequently challenged, by the decision-makers.

The aforementioned long underwear anecdotally illustrate a comprehensive issue whose theoretical foundation has been described by Karin Hausen in her historical essays where the concept of *Geschlechterordnung* (gender order) is used.<sup>4</sup> Following Hausen’s approach, the *Geschlechterordnung* is definable as a norm and system of instructions directing concrete behaviours and actions, and unceasingly reconstructed with use of easily assimilable actions, signs, images, ideas,

<sup>3</sup> ‘Report on the account of received and dispensed objects and materials from the depot of the Intendancy of the ‘Stefan Batory’ University in Wilno, as of 24 May to 1 July 1920’, in the Manuscripts Section of the Wilno University Library, class. no. F97-BU 23.

<sup>4</sup> Karin Hausen, *Porządek płci. Studia historyczne*, transl. into Polish by Justyna Górny (Warszawa, 2010).

idioms, and concepts. Cultural order of gender is liable to historical change or transition, whereas its basic rules remain unaffected.<sup>5</sup> Preservation, maintenance and solidification of the binding normative forms of thinking and conduct, particularly those concerning gender relations, has been supported by strategies applied in modern European society, which have been described by Karin Hausen. One such action is described as ‘verbal defence of established positions through discriminative recognition’, this consisting of common ideas and introducing folk wisdoms affording primacy of women in using the needle and thread, but nowise the skill of using the quill. This simple means has caused that men were ascribed features such as creativity, brilliance or genius, ability to deal with science or politics – which in itself was a measure counteracting any competition to males.<sup>6</sup> The other dimension was the institutional regulation and enshrinement of access to officially recognised university-level education institutions to men only, with women being only left the ‘privilege’ of studying with private premarital education institutions which merely qualified for the role of housewife.<sup>7</sup>

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, most European countries – including the Polish territory – saw the outset of the battle for admission of women and girls to secondary- and higher-level education.<sup>8</sup> Mobilised and pursued by the women’s movement, the battle for access to education came across counter-reactions in the form of quasi-scientific writings and pamphlets arguing how mediocre or inferior

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<sup>5</sup> Hausen, *Porządek*, 32.

<sup>6</sup> Karin Hausen, ‘Eine eigentümliche Gewissheit ... dass Intellektuelle im 20. Jahrhundert ausnahmslos unter Menschen männlichen Geschlechts zu finden seien’, in Gesa Dane and Barbara Hahn (eds.), *Denk- und Schreibweisen einer Intellektuellen im 20. Jahrhundert. Über Ricarda Huch* (Göttingen, 2012), 197. In the Polish context, an excellent example is the *Encyclopaedia of ‘the Other Gender’* by Władysław Kopaliński (several editions), containing quotations, bon mots and proverbs related to ‘woman’ in a number of aspects (education, intelligence, etc.); for more, see Władysław Kopaliński, *Encyklopedia “drugiej płci”. Wszystko o kobietach* (Warszawa, 2006) 384, 432.

<sup>7</sup> Hausen, ‘Eine eigentümliche’, 197.

<sup>8</sup> Juliane Jacobi, *Mädchen- und Frauenbildung in Europa. Von 1500 bis zur Gegenwart* (Frankfurt am Main and New York, 2013); Jan Hulewicz, *Sprawa wyższego wykształcenia kobiet w Polsce w XIX wieku* (Kraków, 1939) 258–66; Bogusława Czajecka, “Z domu w szeroki świat”. *Droga kobiet do niezależności w zaborze austriackim w latach 1890–1914* (Kraków, 1990); Katarzyna Dormus, *Problematyka wychowawczo-oświatowa w prasie kobiecej zaboru austriackiego w latach 1826–1918* (Warszawa, 2006).

female minds were.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, actions that consistently imposed discursive separation of the public sphere with its offices, political rights and obligations as well as educational and authority-wielding opportunities from the private sphere – the latter forming a specific amalgam of family, children, spouse, and household, established as the primary activity and ‘natural calling’ of women, efficiently solidified the dichotomous picture that assigned women to the private sphere, marked by dominance of nature, whereas men were to belong to the public domain, related to culture. The conviction has long (perhaps until today) prevailed that science is an exclusive adventure and not everybody can deal with it – and those who do are, normally, men, while women are at best its new ‘source’ or, most commonly, tend to be perceived as an ‘alien element’. Otherness as a category was not approached as an enriching aspect but as a threat, a factor that desacralized an almost divine order which emerged with the origin of universities and was disseminated over centuries as an exclusively male domain.<sup>10</sup> The very act of admitting, or tacit agreement for entering the ‘temple of science’ by those thereto excluded from its premises, was meant to be a sort of mystery (as conceived by those responsible for the act). The combat for recognition and admission to participate in the mystery of knowledge, authority and prestige comprises the possible and often indispensable processes of previous exclusion, non-recognition, obliteration. Thus, parallels arise between religious and scientific structures, whose determinant (and common denominator) was the male perspective approached as per se universalistic, and lasting opposition against the processes of inclusion of women of the authority in the Churches as well as in science.<sup>11</sup> That sex/gender,

<sup>9</sup> A symbolical example is Otto Weininger’s work *Geschlecht und Charakter* [publ. in English as *Sex and Character*], translated into a number of languages and forming an exemplary model of anti-feminine discourse.

<sup>10</sup> An excellent example, though dealing with a single area of science in one cultural context, is the study by Falko Schnicke, *Die Männliche Disziplin. Zur Vergeschlechtlichung der deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft 1780–1900* (Göttingen, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> This is attested, among other things, by the titles of studies by various authors, which indicate the hardships accompanying forcing one’s way through to academia and a ‘sacred’ character of the latter; cf., *inter alia*, Kristine von Soden, ‘Auf dem Weg in die Tempel der Wissenschaft. Zur Durchsetzung des Frauenstudiums im Wilhelminischen Deutschland’, in Ute Gerhardt (ed.), *Frauen in der Geschichte des Rechts. Von der Frühen Neuzeit bis zur Gegenwart* (München, 1997), 617–32. Moreover, parallels can be sought between the participation of women (and, thereby, a trans-

social background, the professed religion, ethnicity or nationality and, in certain contexts, the colour of skin determine the membership and the process of inclusion and recognition by prestigious or culturally homogeneous social groups, has already been proved by numerous studies and researches.<sup>12</sup>

The concepts concerning the presence of women, their role and entry into the previously socially and gender-wise homogeneous space and knowledge production places is a topic that has been addressed and broadly discussed by the public opinion since the middle of the nineteenth century; with time, echoes of these debates reverberated in fiction and motion pictures.<sup>13</sup>

This article primarily seeks to take a closer glance on the Polish context, which is identifiable with the processes of women's entering into the world of European science – initially as tertiary students and subsequently as first-ever female research workers and/or members of academic staff. The evolution of Polish science and the transformations of the gender order provides one of the many examples of how the thoughts, ideas and concepts – those concerning the defective female intellect, along with projects of growing empowered through education – ‘wandered’ in time and space. Approached in terms of a research challenge, science and gender, are still underrepresented in Polish historical studies, in spite of the foundations provided in the preceding decades by the works of Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej

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formed gender order) in the structures of Christian Churches (namely, Catholic and Protestant) and women's entry and participation in science; the Christian Churches in respect of the role of women are dealt with by, among others, Elżbieta Adamiak, *Milcząca obecność* (Kraków, 1999); Carmel Elisabeth McEnroy, *Guests in Their Own House. The Women of Vatican II* (New York, 1996); Elizabeth A. Castelli and Rosamond C. Rodman (eds.), *Women, Gender, Religion: A Reader* (Basingstoke, 2001); Zuzanna Radzik, *Kościół kobiet* (Warszawa, 2015); Helen Schüngel-Straumann, *Feministische Theologie und Gender. Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven* (Münster, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Christina Möller, *Herkunft zählt (fast) immer. Soziale Ungleichheiten unter Universitätsprofessorinnen und -professoren* (Weinheim and Basel, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> Hedwig Dohm, *Über wissenschaftliche Emanzipation der Frau* (Berlin, 1874) [translated into Polish by Julia Zawiszevska as *Kobieta i wiedza* (Warszawa, 1884)]; Maria Cheliga, *Na przebój* (Kraków, 1889); Ilse Frapan, *Wir Frauen haben kein Vaterland. Monologe einer Fledermaus* (Berlin, 1899); also, cf. the article by Justyna Górny published in this volume. For the related ideas reflected in the motion-picture works at the turn of the century, see Mariann Lewinsky (ed.), *Cento Anni Fa: Comic Actresses and Suffragettes 1910–1914*, DVD and Booklet (Bologna, 2010).

Szwarc, and by Urszula Perkowska.<sup>14</sup> There are no basic synthesising studies or biographies available that would have translate the subject-matter in question into broader reception. I add the need for comparative studies – for writing a trans-national history of science in a gender perspective – to the list of research postulates. The triple challenge of history of gender and science in East Central Europe becomes gradually represented among international researchers.<sup>15</sup>

The methodological solutions assumed for the purpose hereof consist of reflections concerning the perspective of collective biography. Expected to deal with a group of people and the relations of its members, such a biography would seek for what is typical and general for the collective as well as for what is untypical and standing out, searching for the individual(s) within the group.<sup>16</sup> I have drawn the reflection on historical biography, which is of particular importance in creating new or deconstructing the existing biographies of Polish women researchers, from the female historians dealing with the subject-matter. These authors have pointed to the threat implied by the focus on intellectual and textual (literary) associations instead of describing the (female) protagonist's life.<sup>17</sup> Dealing with gender relations (including in science) calls for radicalised criticism of historical sources, new reading and deconstructing the solidified elements of the experienced reality and patterns of perception and comprehension at work at a given moment.<sup>18</sup> Writing a history of science in the gender

<sup>14</sup> Urszula Perkowska, 'Kariery naukowe kobiet na Uniwersytecie Jagiellońskim 1904–1939', in Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarc (eds.), *Kobieta i kultura. Kobiety wśród twórców kultury intelektualnej i artystycznej w dobie rozbiorowej i w niepodległym państwie polskim* (Warszawa, 1996), 139–56; Jerzy Halbersztadt, 'Kobiety w murach Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 1915–1939', *ibidem*, 107–26; Dorota Mazurczak, 'Kariery akademickie kobiet w Polsce międzywojennej – Uniwersytet Poznański', *ibidem*, 127–38.

<sup>15</sup> Ina Alber and Claudia Kraft, 'Geschlecht und Wissen(schaft) in Ostmitteleuropa – Einleitung', in Ina Alber and Claudia Kraft, *Geschlecht und Wissen(schaft) in Ostmitteleuropa* (Marburg, 2017), 2–3; also, see the text by Claudia Kraft in this issue of *APH*.

<sup>16</sup> Levke Harders and Hannes Schweiger, 'Kollektivbiographische Ansätze', in Christian Klein (ed.), *Handbuch Biographie. Methoden, Traditionen, Theorien* (Stuttgart and Weimar, 2009), 194.

<sup>17</sup> Anita Runge, 'Gender Studies', in Klein, *Handbuch Biographie*, 405; also, see Susane Blumensberg and Ilse Korotin (eds.), *Frauenbiographieforschung. Theoretische Diskurse und methodologische Konzepte* (Wien, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> Hausen, *Porządek*, 33.

perspective confronts the researcher with gaps, deficiencies, and lost items in women's outputs. Scarcities, due to negligently elaborated legacies, are particularly evident in the archives of female scientists. Archival (re)search also tends to reveal vectors of thinking along the beaten track, where figures of independent and creative women researchers or scholars are inconceivable.<sup>19</sup>

The considerations following below have been based on documents from the archives of L'viv, Cracow, Warsaw, Vilnius, and Poznań, related to the scientific policies of the universities, biographies of individuals, and descriptions of events in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>20</sup> Added to these are brochures and publications dealing with the topic, (auto)biographic texts by the female protagonists, and articles in periodicals rendering a broad reading public acquainted with the problems shared by the first researches.<sup>21</sup> Due to the influence of the German cultural circle on cultural and social phenomena, including academic cultures, in the Polish lands, I have included in my discussion selected sources of a similar genre.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Levke Harders, 'Archive der Wissenschaften. Die Amerikanistin Miriam M. Heffernan. Eine Personalakte gibt Auskunft', in *L'Homme*, xxiv, 1 (2013) 119–23; Li Gerhalter, 'Sammlung Frauennachlässe', in Claudia Feigl (ed.), *Schaukästen der Wissenschaft. Die Sammlungen an der Universität Wien* (Wien, Köln and Weimar, 2012) 53–5; see also Anita Chodkowska, 'A path by the road': woman-made material in men's archives in the Archive of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, published in the present volume of *APH*.

<sup>20</sup> Specifically, these are university records from Cracow and Lwów from before 1918 and later (to 1939), as well as the resources of the Universities of Warsaw, Wilno, and Poznań (once constituted). Although science and its pursuit are trans-national, due to the limited space I have quit analysing the files of 'foreign' universities with which scientists associated with Polish universities shaped their intellectual formation.

<sup>21</sup> Cecylia Walewska, *Kobieta polska w nauce* (Warszawa, 1922), series: 'Życiorysy zasłużonych kobiet' (the series included volumes on Jadwiga Petrażycka-Tomicka and Dr Józefa Joteyko [Kraków, 1931], among others); Wacława Tatarówna, *Marja Curie-Skłodowska: genialna uczona* (Kraków, 1935); and, the memoirs: Alicja Dorabalska, *Jeszcze jedno życie* (Warszawa, 1972); Hugo Steinhaus, *Wspomnienia i zapiski* (Londyn, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> These are not infrequently the same matrices which shaped the public debates for/against modernisation novelties; cf. Elga Kern, *Führende Frauen Europas: in sechzehn Selbstschilderungen* (München, 1928); Gertrud Bäumer, *Krisis des Frauenstudiums* (Leipzig, 1932); also, see Julian Dybiec, *Polska w orbicie wielkich idei: polskie przekłady obcojęzycznego piśmiennictwa 1795–1918* (Warszawa, 2011).



## II

‘EQUAL RIGHTS, UNEQUAL OPPORTUNITIES’?  
THE ORGANISATION OF SCIENCE IN POLAND AFTER 1918

After the breakthrough year 1918, attempts were made to set up higher schools and standardise the regulations for academic and scientific activity in the newly-(re)emerged Poland. Apart from the universities that functioned under the Partitions, in Lwów and Cracow, and the recently established (1915) Polish university in Warsaw, the state initiated the formation of new tertiary schools at the time the formation of its authorities and frontiers was underway. Although the role of the state and its instances cannot be overestimated, the decisive role in the establishment of ‘local’ universities rested – as Dorota Zamojska remarks – with the spontaneous and unprompted social initiative. It was owing to this factor that the work was initiated on the organisation of a university in Warsaw in as early as 1915, its counterparts in Poznań and Wilno emerged after 1918. The efforts were supervised by bodies formed of volunteers, mostly members of the local intelligentsia not associated with academic circles.<sup>23</sup> The Government’s work on draft regulations for higher schools was concluded in mid-1920; in July, Maciej Rataj, as Minister of Religious Confessions and Public Education, signed a higher education law whose Article 2 provided that “Lecturing at academic schools may be done by scholars, as professors and docents (readers), regardless of their sex, who have contributed to the development of theoretical or practical sciences”.<sup>24</sup> The phrase ‘regardless of their sex’ was meant to invalidate, as if automatically, the previous preclusive provisions and render available to women not only the ‘auxiliary activities’, which they performed since around 1900 at two Polish universities, in Cracow and in Lwów, as teachers of languages or demonstrators, but also their own creative work and scientific positions such as readership and professorship.<sup>25</sup> The further articles of the Law on Academic Schools provided meticulous

<sup>23</sup> Dorota Zamojska, *Akademicy i urzędnicy. Kształtowanie ustroju państwowych szkół wyższych w Polsce 1915–1920* (Warszawa, 2009), 17–18.

<sup>24</sup> The Law on Academic Schools of 13 July 1920, *Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland* (1920), no. 72, item 494, art. 2.

<sup>25</sup> For more on women’s work at the Jagiellonian University before 1918, see Urszula Perkowska, *Kształtowanie się zespołu naukowego w Uniwersytecie Jagiellońskim 1860–1920* (Wrocław, Warszawa and Kraków, 1975), pp. 32–6; Janina Suchmiel, *Działalność naukowa kobiet w Uniwersytecie we Lwowie do roku 1939* (Częstochowa, 2000).



regulations related to the *habilitation* (postdoctoral) procedure to which women were admitted, based on the universalistic expression ‘regardless of their sex’ mentioned at the beginning of the Law.<sup>26</sup>

The newly established universities in Warsaw, Poznań and Wilno and the reorganised Galician tertiary schools in Cracow and Lwów became the arena of implementation of the adopted Law.<sup>27</sup> National content was critical in creating the profile of higher schools: the ‘Polishness’ of universities was considered the top priority; their ancillary role in respect to the cultural and civilizational needs of Polish society was emphasised.<sup>28</sup> The nationality issue, the one of ethnic and confessional identification at universities, overlapped with the gender issue; especially at the Universities in Lwów and Wilno the problem of ethnic minorities and that of women students (Polish, Jewish Polish, or Ukrainians, the latter scarce in number) were strictly correlated.<sup>29</sup> The rectors of both Universities postulated, at conferences of rectors and elsewhere, to extend the *numerus clausus* to female students. The year 1927 saw a debate on whether, and possibly how, to restrict the inflow of ‘the female element’ – Polish, Jewish, and Ukrainian – into the universities. The double marginalization of the two latter categories,

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<sup>26</sup> The Law on Academic Schools, Arts. 50 to 59. The phrase ‘regardless of their sex’ was adopted from the Law of 28 Nov. 1918 that afforded suffrage and eligibility to stand for election to citizens in general (women included); as regards the policy toward women, it marked a sort of linguistic follow-up and a specific semantic technique.

<sup>27</sup> Tomasz Kizwalter and Piotr M. Majewski (eds.), *Dzieje Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 1915–1945*, series ‘Monumenta Universitatis Varsoviensis 1816–2016’ (Warszawa, 2016); Jerzy Laskowski and Grzegorz Łukomski (eds.), *W hołdzie naszym Antenatom. 85 lat Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza* (Poznań, 2004); Dorota Zamojska “‘Ta ludność życzy mieć uniwersytet’.... Walka o utworzenie Uniwersytetu Stefana Batorego w Wilnie”, in *Kwartalnik Historii Nauki i Techniki*, li, 2 (2006), 7–46; Alfredas Bumblauskas et al. (eds.), *Alma Mater Vilniensis. Vilniaus universiteto istorijos broužai* (Vilnius, 2012); Julian Dybiec, *Uniwersytet Jagielloński 1918–1939* (Kraków, 2000); Adam Redzik (ed.) *Academia Militans. Uniwersytet Jana Kazimierza we Lwowie* (Kraków, 2015).

<sup>28</sup> Zamojska, *Akademicy*, 18.

<sup>29</sup> The *numerus clausus* is thematised in, *inter alia*, Grzegorz Krzywiec, ‘The Crusade for a Numerus Clausus 1922/1923. Preliminaries of Polish Fascism in the Central and Eastern European Context’, in Regina Fritz, Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe and Jana Starek (eds.), *Alma mater antisemitica: akademisches Milieu, Juden und Antisemitismus an den Universitäten Europas zwischen 1918 und 1939* (Wien, 2016), 67–84; Zofia Trębacz, ‘Ghetto Benches’ at Polish Universities’, in Fritz et al., *Alma mater*, 113–36.

*qua* gender and *qua* ethnicity, was evident; the nation-oriented and anti-Semitic rhetoric overlapped with antifeminist rhetoric.<sup>30</sup> One example is the internal debate at meetings of higher school rectors in the 1920s. At one such meeting, Józef Siemiradzki, Rector of the John Casimir University in Lwów remarked that “two-thirds of the students do not avail themselves of the academic studies; also, excessive numbers of women are striking (in Lwów, for instance, they account for a half of all the students), of whom a half would never complete their studies but they do overfill the laboratories and auditoria: therefore, one cannot deal with the students individually”,<sup>31</sup> His opinion was supported by that of Stanisław Pigoń, Rector of Wilno’s Stefan Batory University, who proposed “to introduce the *numerus clauses* for women as well, since their number oftentimes reaches 70 per cent. Effeminacy is what we are facing these days”.<sup>32</sup>

It seems that the primacy of the anecdotal long underwear mentioned in the opening passage and, consequently, the primacy of the ‘traditional’ order of gender and the related standard ideas about women’s participation in science, reproduced in the academic environment, stood in glaring opposition to the statutory declarations. In their convictions and in their actions put into practice to reduce the number of women students (and thus, researchers-to-be) at their respective local universities, Siemiradzki and Pigoń represented the binding style of thinking that was based on cherishing and supporting a community that was to be homogeneous in terms of sex and ethnicity.

<sup>30</sup> Karin Stögner, *Antisemitismus und Sexismus. Historisch-gesellschaftliche Konstellationen* (Baden-Baden, 2014); Michaela Roggam-Blesch, ‘Zwischen Antifeminismus und Antisemitismus. Jüdische Frauen an der Wiener Universität 1897–1938’, in Fritz *et al.*, *Alma mater*, 245–64; Claudia Huerkamp, ‘Jüdische Akademikerinnen in Deutschland 1900–1939’, in Theresa Wobbe and Gesa Lindemann (eds.), *Denkachsen. Zur theoretischen und institutionellen Rede vom Geschlecht* (Frankfurt am Main 1994), 86–112. As for the Polish context, no consideration on the area of ‘nation–gender–science–anti-Semitism/antifeminism has been offered yet. Most recently, a study on Jewish female students and historians in Poland before 1939 came out: Natalia Aleksy, ‘Female, Jewish, Educated, and Writing Polish Jewish History’, *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry*, xxix (2017), 195–216. A gender perspective in research on Jewish culture and history, with Warsaw as a case in point, is proposed by Agnieszka Jagodzińska, ‘Does History Have a Sex? On Gender, Sources and Jewish Acculturation in the Kingdom of Poland’, in *Gal-Ed*, 22 (2010), 67–87.

<sup>31</sup> Ludwik Zembrzusi (ed.) *Konferencje Rektorów Szkół Akademickich w Polsce w latach 1919–1931. Protokoły narad, uchwały i memorjały* (Warszawa, 1932), 115.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, 119.

With respect to any change connected with the appearance of women at universities (as students and research staff), such mindset was stable and displayed the characteristics of corporate and gender-wise homogeneous community of scholars; any attempt at destabilising it came across determined resistance from the university hierarchs. Could the prevalent order of things have yielded to a structural transformation? To what extent, and owing to whom, if so?

### III

#### *SPIRITUS CREATOR* IN GENDER ORDER TRANSITION

In my view, the group of women who between 1920 and 1939 obtained their *venia legendi* – the right to lecture, conduct seminars and hold examinations – was a collective moving spirit behind the effort for change and transition in the academic circles. Mostly born to intelligentsia or landowning families, the women working on their *habilitation*, belonged to the generation of the first students whose intellectual formation took place on domestic universities – namely, those of Austrian/Polish Galicia (Lwów and Cracow), or foreign universities (Zurich, Paris, and Petersburg).<sup>33</sup> Their entry into science was enabled thanks also to the earlier struggle whose first stage was the opportunity to enrol for a university course, subsequently followed up by the struggle, within the limits of the acquired profession, for being admitted to perform a job.<sup>34</sup> Women successfully won a space for themselves in the academic hierarchy: granted with the postdoctoral

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<sup>33</sup> No comprehensive historical study on female intelligentsia representatives has been written in Poland yet; the studies fragmentarily dealing with the issue include: Andrzej Szwarc, 'Aspiracje edukacyjne i zawodowe kobiet w środowiskach inteligencji Królestwa Polskiego u schyłku XIX wieku', in Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarc (eds.), *Kobieta i edukacja na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX w.*, i (Warszawa, 1992), 95–108; Magdalena Micińska, *Inteligencja na rozdrożach*, in Jerzy Jedlicki (ed.), *Dzieje inteligencji polskiej do 1918 roku*, Part 3 (Warszawa, 2008), 28 ff. (English version: eadem, *At the Crossroads*, in *idem* (ed.), *A History of the Polish Intelligentsia*, transl. by Tristan Korecki, series 'Geschichte – Erinnerung – Politik/Studies in History, Memory and Politics' (Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, and Wien, 2014) 29 ff.); Denis Sdvižkov, *Das Zeitalter der Intelligenz. Zur vergleichenden Geschichte der Gebildeten in Europa bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg* (Göttingen, 2006), 171 ff.

<sup>34</sup> One example is the struggle for availability of legal professions to women; for more on this particular topic, see Sara L. Kimble and Marion Röwekamp's article published in this volume.

qualification or professorship, they had a way paved for them to the academic structures and authority. The extremely rare instances of women being granted with a *venia legendi* and even rarer cases of their professorial nominations can be regarded as a litmus paper showing the specified discipline's or the university milieu's openness for the 'new sources'. In the interwar period, postdoctoral qualification became a coordinate of personal professional development and the central aspect of the struggle of female pioneers of knowledge for recognition in emotional, legal, and solidarity terms (*Liebe – Recht – Solidarität*).<sup>35</sup> Successful postdoctoral qualifications were sparse among women, compared to the *habilitation* and professorial qualifications among males; a woman's way to postdoctoral degree or professorship was individual and subjected to numerous determinants, substantive and not only.

The first postdoctoral and professorship qualifications obtained by women largely depended on the tutor's goodwill and support; a beneficial coincidence could have had a say too. This group of female individualists (each in their area), an active and creative part of the intelligentsia, not only pioneered in science but proactively contributed to the scientific administration and policy. A significant group of Polish female *habilitation* candidates and professors were active with the Polish Association of Women with Higher Education (Polskie Stowarzyszenie Kobiet z Wyższym Wykształceniem, hereinafter: PSKzWW) and its branches based in five university cities. The Association as well as the International Federation of University Women formed a platform for both domestic and international work supporting and representing the interests of 'science women'.<sup>36</sup> Those of them who were first granted a *habilitation* or professorship formed a rather small group, diverse in terms of academic disciplines, worldviews, socio-cultural and, last but not least, political aspects. Postdoctoral qualifications of women accounted for a definite minority of the *venia legendi* rights granted: within less than twenty years under the

<sup>35</sup> Axel Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung. Zur moralischen Grammatik sozialer Konflikte* (Frankfurt am Main, 1993).

<sup>36</sup> Iwona Dadej, *Die Frau von Morgen. Frauenpolitisch tätige Akademikerinnen in Deutschland und in Polen, 1918–1939*, PhD thesis submitted at the Freie Universität Berlin, 2015 (an edition prepared by the Deutsches Historisches Institut in Warschau is forthcoming); Christine von Oertzen, *Science, Gender, and Internationalism: Women's Academic Networks, 1917–1955* (London and New York, 2014).

Law of July 1920, they were related to approximately fifty *habilitation* procedures completed for the five State-owned universities.<sup>37</sup> Comparing to the postdoctoral qualifications obtained by men in the same period and at the same universities, the figure could be distributed into one or two years. Urszula Perkowska used the following simile in her summary of the statistics concerning postdoctoral qualifications: during the whole period of the Second Republic of Poland and its universities, exactly as many women got their *habilitation* as there were men ‘habilitated’ in the single wartime year 1916. Thus, as long as the Second Republic existed, more postdoctoral degrees were obtained by men than women.<sup>38</sup> For the five universities, an increase trend could be seen in the proportion of women in academic structures, the share in per-cent terms being 5 per cent into 18–19 per cent. The differences can be spotted on the department/faculty level: Medicine and Philosophy both had a two-digit number of employed females; Law, in turn, had the least number of female ‘auxiliary’ workers.<sup>39</sup> Apart from those women researchers and members of academic staff who managed to fulfil their potential thanks to their personal determination and support from their superiors, there were doctorate holders employed at universities or research institutes, whose contributions to the development of individual disciplines as well as to Poland’s can by no means be neglected.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> The precise statistics of the *habilitation* candidates is not an easy task since some of them are double-counted – namely, for the university granting the degree and the one employing the candidate.

<sup>38</sup> Urszula Perkowska, *Kształtowanie się zespołu naukowego w Uniwersytecie Jagiellońskim 1860–1920*, series ‘Monografie z dziejów nauki i techniki’, 48 (Wrocław, 1975), 43.

<sup>39</sup> Perkowska, ‘Kariery naukowe’, 140. Faculties or departments of law only offered employment for women as auxiliary staff; none of the universities granted *habilitation*, let alone professorship, to a woman; see Iwona Dadej, “‘The Napoleonic Civil Code is to blame for my decision to study law’”. Female Polish law students and lawyers in the first half of the twentieth century’, in Sara Kimble and Marion Röwekamp (eds.), *New Perspectives on European Women’s Legal History* (London, 2016) 217–46; Przemysław M. Żukowski, *Wydział Prawa Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego w Krakowie w latach 1918–1939* (Kraków, 2016).

<sup>40</sup> Strictly associated with science and employed with research institutes (the Ossolineum, the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences [PAU], State Institute of Hygiene [PZH], or the Free University [Wolna Wszechnica]) were Eugenia Kurkowa, Stanisława Adamowiczowa, Józefa Joteyko, and other leading women researchers in Poland (I do not cover them in detail due to volume constraints).

The Jagiellonian University, Poland's oldest, had a total of fifteen *venia legendi* procedures completed for women scholars between 1919 and the outbreak of the Second World War.<sup>41</sup> In terms of disciplines, their representation was well-balanced: in natural sciences, including medical sciences, seven postdoctoral candidates were granted their degrees; namely: Helena Gajewska in Comparative Anatomy; Maria Skalińska in Botany, 1924; Aniela Kozłowska in Botanical Geography, 1930; Laura Kaufman in Zoology, 1930; Jadwiga Wołoszyńska in Botany, 1930; Janina Kowalczakowa in Pathology and Anatomy, 1936; Jadwiga Ackermann in Histology, 1939. Wanda Rewieńska's *veniam legendi* procedure was due in autumn 1939, but failed due to the war. The postdoctoral degree in the humanities was received by Ludwika Dobrzyńska-Rybicka, in Philosophy, in 1920; Antonina Otrębska-Jabłońska in Slavic Philology, 1934; Bronisława Wójcik-Keuprulian in Musicology, 1934; Eugenia Stołyhwo in Anthropology, 1935; Zofia Kozłowska-Budkowa in History and its Auxiliary Sciences, 1937; and, Mieczysława Ruxerówna in Archaeology, 1937.<sup>42</sup> The University of Warsaw witnessed between 1922 and 1939 a total of twelve postdoctoral qualification procedures completed. The first successful candidate (1922) was Cezaria Badouin de Courtenay-Ehrenkreutz, who for almost a decade was the only postdoctoral degree holder at the University. The years 1932–4 saw a 'wave' of completed *habilitation* procedures by women at the Faculty of Philosophy: the degrees were granted to Maria Ossowska, Natalia Gąsiorowska-Grabowska, Zofia Gąsiorowska-Schmydtowa, Dina Sztejnberg (later known as Janina Kotarbińska), Wanda Moszczeńska, Halina Koneczna, Hanna Pohoska, and Bożena Stelmachowska.<sup>43</sup> Another three postdoctoral degrees were conferred at the Faculty of Medicine: on bacteriologist Helena Sparrow-Germa, internist Eleonora Reicher, and paediatrician

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<sup>41</sup> See Perkowska, 'Kariery naukowe', 151, and Materials of the Jagiellonian University Archive [AUJ], personal records of Wanda Reweńska, in AUJ, class. no.WF II122.

<sup>42</sup> Detailed information on the postdoctoral submissions and completed procedures can be found in the AUJ, particularly under class. nos. WL II 133, WF II 122, and S II 619, as well as in the personal records of the individuals concerned; also, see Urszula Perkowska *et al.*, *Corpus Studiosorum Universitatis Jagellonicae 1850/51–1917/18* (Kraków, 2014); Perkowska, 'Kariery naukowe', 150.

<sup>43</sup> Report on the activities of the Faculty of the Humanities, University of Warsaw, for the years 1927/8 to 1936/7 (Warszawa, 1928–1938).



Marta Ehrlich.<sup>44</sup> The John Casimir University in Lwów carried out two *habilitation* procedures at the Faculty of Philosophy, for Łucja Charewiczowa, a historian, and art historian Karolina Lanckorońska, both in the 1930s.<sup>45</sup> The newly established University of Poznań drew its resources from internal academic migration and most of its female postdoctoral holders came from other academic centres. The first postdoctoral degree in the domain of natural sciences – specifically, Anthropology – was conferred in 1922 on Michalina Stefanowska, whose career evolved in Geneva, Paris, and Brussels; in 1926, psychiatrist Anna Gruszecka, and in 1929, Helena Polackówna, a historian from Lwów, specialising in heraldry and sigillography got their postdoctoral degrees. In 1936, the *habilitation* was conferred on Jadwiga Marszewska-Ziemiecka at the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry.<sup>46</sup> The Stefan Batory University in Wilno granted in 1930 the degree to Jadwiga Murynowicz in Medical Sciences, and in 1937 to Wilhelmina Iwanowska in Astronomy.<sup>47</sup>

Appointment to a university chair and assignment of professorship was a rare exception in the course of a female's scientific career. The first woman to have received associate professorship was Helena Willmann-Grabowska, an expert in Sanskrit, at the Jagiellonian University in 1929; this consequently made her Head of the Institute of Sanskrit and Indian Philology thereat. The subsequent two professorships with the same University were conferred, respectively, on botanist and pharmacist Jadwiga Wołoszyńska in 1932 and botanist Maria Skalińska.<sup>48</sup> Three professorships were given to women scientists at the University of Warsaw: Cezaria Badouin de Courtenay-Ehrenkreuz, ethnographer and folk researcher, was promoted to full professor in 1934;<sup>49</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Halbersztadt, 'Kobiety w murach', 107–26.

<sup>45</sup> Suchmiel, *Działalność naukowa kobiet*, 130 ff.; Jadwiga Suchmiel, *Łucja Charewiczowa. Życie i dzieło* (Częstochowa, 2001), 59; Iwona Dadej, "'Polnische Wissenschaft ist meine Göttin auf der Erde". Nation – Exil – Wissenschaft und Geschlecht bei Karolina Lanckorońska', in *ARIADNE. Forum für Frauen- und Geschlechtergeschichte*, 72 (2017), 28–34.

<sup>46</sup> Mazurczak, 'Kariery akademickie', 127–38.

<sup>47</sup> Wilhelmina Iwanowska, 'Mój życiorys naukowy', in *Kwartalnik Historii Nauki i Techniki*, xxvi, 2 (1981), 247–78.

<sup>48</sup> Perkowska, 'Kariery naukowe', 154; also, personal records in the AUJ, class. no. S II 619.

<sup>49</sup> Zofia Sokolewicz, 'Cezaria Badouin de Courtenay Ehrenkreuz-Jędrzejewiczowa', in Kizwalter and Majewski (eds.), *Dzieje Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego..., Profesorowie*



Irena Maternowska, veterinarian, was made assistant professor in 1937; a year later, paediatrician Marta Erlich was nominated titular professor.<sup>50</sup> Ludwika Dobrzyńska-Rybicka was granted titular professorship with the University of Poznań in 1931.<sup>51</sup> The Lwów University of Technology employed in 1936 chemist Alicja Dorabialska as Head of the Chair of Physical Chemistry.<sup>52</sup>

Taking a look at each of the five university microcosms in the Interbellum period, it can be concluded that university careers – the visible and spectacular ones, such as postdoctoral and professorial qualifications, and participation of women in production of knowledge as members of auxiliary staff – depended not only on the regulations superimposed by a ministry but, primarily, on the local scientific policy, the position assumed by the faculties or departments, and individual decisions of their heads. The role of the Universities of Cracow and Warsaw clearly stands out in the scientific policy landscape: both provided a specific ‘oasis’ for women academicians with postdoctoral degree. Even if not ‘female-friendly’, their structures were at least not ‘definitely anti-female’.<sup>53</sup> The academic environment of Cracow – though hermetic, guarding its own privileges and cherishing the myth that “[p]rofessorship in Cracow and the Cracow world was in the prewar time [i.e. before the First World War] the most dignified form of life”<sup>54</sup> – was avant-garde countrywide as far as postdoctoral degrees and professorships for women are concerned. As for the other

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*Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 1915–1945 (A–L)* (Warszawa, 2016), 72–81; Dorota Zamojska, ‘Cezaria Baudouin de Courtenay Ehrenkreutz-Jędrzejewiczowa’, in Żarnowska and Szwarz, *Kobieta i kultura*, 157–74; personal records of Cezaria Baudouin de Courtenay Ehrenkreutz-Jędrzejewiczowa, Ministry of Religious Confessions and Public Education, class. no. 3142, Central Archives of Modern Records [AAN].

<sup>50</sup> Report of the Rector on the activities of the University of Warsaw for the year 1937/38, Warszawa 1938, p. 12; Halbersztadt, ‘Kobiety w murach ...’, 120; Piotr M. Majewski, ‘Społeczność akademicka 1915–1939’, in *idem* (ed.), *Dzieje Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 1915–1945* (Warszawa, 2016), series ‘Monumenta Universitatis Varsoviensis’.

<sup>51</sup> Mazurczak, ‘Kariery akademickie’, 130.

<sup>52</sup> Dorabialska, *Jeszcze*.

<sup>53</sup> Annette Vogt, *Vom Hintereingang zum Hauptportal? Lise Meitner und ihre Kolleginnen an der Berliner Universität und in der Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart, 2007), 171.

<sup>54</sup> Janina Żółtowska z Puttkamerów, *Dziennik. Fragmenty wielkopolskie 1919–1933*, ed. by Barbara Wysocka (Poznań, 2003), 105.

three State-owned universities (Lwów, Wilno, and Poznań), women's postdoctoral qualifications before 1939 were incidental.

#### IV

#### HOMO ACADEMICUS AND (POSSIBLY) HIS/HER GENDER

Of the group of postdoctoral candidates and professors, I have chosen two women whose scientific path illustrates the struggle for the levels of academic prestige in the entire generation of female pioneers of science. The professional trajectories of Helena Willmann-Grabowska, the Paris-based expert in Sanskrit and Indology, a professor in Cracow since 1929, and Helena Polaczkówna, historian and archivist from Lwów, who received her *habilitation* in Poznań, have many points in common as far as the process of promotion to university positions is concerned. These individuals, their personal histories, and the need to incessantly position themselves and fight for recognition prove to emblematic for the whole small group of the first (European) women scientists. And, both of them are symbolic representatives of *homines academici* as comprehended by Pierre Bourdieu and Friederike Hassauer, who researched into the academic habitus, distinctions, and community, where masculinity had an objectivising and universalising function.<sup>55</sup> This androcentric perspective on scientific phenomena and on science-constituting mechanisms, and the assumption that masculinist norms should remain prevalent, became the object of description and critical reflection; those who had hitherto been structurally and discursively excluded began looking for a place for themselves in science. A group of women accepted the positions offered to them in the academic hierarchy which turned up to be secondary, less visible, and offering a lesser chance for success.<sup>56</sup>

A Sanskrit researchers and Orientalist scholar, Helena Willmann-Grabowska (1870–1957) was a student of Warsaw's Flying University and a junior high school (*gimnazjum*) teacher who left (on her own, just with a small child) for Switzerland in 1909 to do her regular studies

<sup>55</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo academicus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988), transl. by Bernd Schwibs; Friederike Hassauer, *Homo. Academica. Geschlechterkontrakte, Institution und die Verteilung des Wissens* (Wien, 1994).

<sup>56</sup> Agnieszka Majcher and Annette Zimmer, 'Hochschule und Wissenschaft: Karrierechancen und -hindernisse für Frauen', in Ruth Becker and Beate Kortendiek (eds.), *Handbuch Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung*, 590–6.

there. She studied linguistics and comparative literature in Bern and Lausanne and completed both majors as a PhD; it was then that she made up her mind to ‘only work as a scientist’.<sup>57</sup> After she moved to Paris in 1911, she devoted herself to general linguistics and Sanskrit, and was nominated a lecturer in Sanskrit and Pali as a contractual professor with the École des hautes études in 1920. As she remarks in her memoirs, her employment with the Sorbonne was a sensation due to her descent (she was not a French national), sex, and wealth; a year later she was promoted to associate professor, the first such woman in the Jagiellonian University’s history. She waited another ten years, until September 1937, to become a full professor.<sup>58</sup> Willmann-Grabowska’s professional development path is an example of a trans-national professional trajectory typical of a part of Polish academic staff: from conspiratorial studies in Warsaw through to academic migration abroad, winning a position in science there, and remigration after 1918, followed by joining the scientific and political (re)building of the country.<sup>59</sup> Quitting the recognition and guaranteed university privileges in Paris, and arrival in Poland, meant for Willmann-Grabowska a loss of the position she had managed to gain on her own in French academic culture. It also stood for an arduous way of building from scratch, under the difficult social and living conditions of her research department affiliated to the Jagiellonian University.<sup>60</sup> Her intellectual potential and embedment in the scientific environment have not been appreciated or used by the University, though; one of the reasons might have been Willmann-Grabowska’s attitude: a politically active woman (also as a feminist), she was doubtlessly an ‘interfering (female) thinker’ (*eingreifende Denkerin*).<sup>61</sup> In the short passages of her biography, Willmann-Grabowska points to her sex as the actual number-one reason for her inadequate salaries reckoned for her in the 1930s as well as after the Second World War, and her delayed promotion to the Chair. Thus, she became one of the

<sup>57</sup> Dossier of Helena Willmann-Grabowska, AUJ, class. no. S II 619.

<sup>58</sup> Renata Czekalska and Agnieszka Kuczkiewicz-Fras, *Helena Willmann-Grabowska. Orientalistka – uczona – popularyzatorka* (Kraków, 2014), 18.

<sup>59</sup> Martin Kohlrausch, Katrin Steffen and Stefan Wiederkehr (eds.), *Expert Cultures in Central Eastern Europe. The Internationalization of Knowledge and the Transformation of Nation States since World War I* (Osnabrück, 2010).

<sup>60</sup> Dossier of Helena Willmann-Grabowska, AUJ, class. no. S II 619.

<sup>61</sup> Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, *Eingreifende Denkerinnen: Weibliche Intellektuelle im 20. und 21. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen, 2015).

quite many women researchers who, having qualified outside Polish universities, returned home after 1918 and, once there, did not receive adequate positions at local universities (compared to what they were offered abroad); this was particularly striking compared to the careers of their repatriate colleagues.<sup>62</sup>

Helena Polaczkówna (1881–1943) was associated for her entire professional life with Austrian/Polish Galicia – specifically, Lwów and the local university, where she completed her studies at the Faculty of History in 1909. She took advantage of her foreign study sojourn in 1922/3 at the *École nationale des chartes* and the *École pratique des hautes études* in Paris to get acquainted with the output of French mediaevalists, and with the new currents and research methods in the area. In 1930, she worked at the Vatican Archives on commission by the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences [PAU], doing search there for her own work as well.<sup>63</sup> Her career was associated with the archives of Lwów, particularly, the National Archive of Municipal and District Records (so-called Bernardine Archive), becoming with time one of the custodians of the latter. In the milieu of historians, she won renown for herself as a specialist in heraldry, sciences auxiliary to history, sigillography, and archive studies. Not hesitating to polemicise with mediaevalists of renown, Polaczkówna repeatedly undermined their arguments with use of her own, well-matched arguments. In the environment of institutionalised science, she actively worked with the Polish Historical Society, the Historical Committee of the PAU, the Section of Culture and Arts of the Scientific Society in Lwów, and, with the Polish Heraldic Society. She was a member of the PAU's

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<sup>62</sup> Biographies of Helena Willmann-Grabowska, Michalina Stefanowska, and Helena Kononowicz-Wiewiórska, the expert scholars in their fields back in their home country after 1918, have not been written yet; Józefa Joteyko's biography is being prepared by Sophie Schwarzmaier (as a doctoral thesis, tentatively entitled *Biographische Annäherungen an Transnationalität, Geschlechterordnungen und Expertentum in der Wissenschaft: Józefa Joteyko (1866–1928) zwischen Belgien und Polen*, at the Europa-Universität Viadrina Frankfurt [Oder]).

<sup>63</sup> Stefan Ciara, 'Helena Polaczkówna (1881–1942)', in Jerzy Maternicki, Paweł Sierżęga and Leonid Zaskilniak (eds.), *Złota księga historiografii lwowskiej XIX i XX wieku* (Rzeszów, 2014) 365–76; also, see Aniela Kielbicka 'Polaczkówna Helena' in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny* (hereinafter: PSB), xxvii (Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków, 1982) 267–9; Wanda Kaput 'Polaczkówna Helena' in Maria Bielińska and Irena Janosz-Biskupowa (eds.), *Słownik biograficzny archiwistów polskich*, i: 1918–1984 (Warszawa, 1988), 170–2.

Historical Committee, which worked then on compilation of the Polish Bibliographical Dictionary.<sup>64</sup> In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, Polackówna's postdoctoral qualification at her alma mater in Lwów came across resistance from academic authorities before the *venia legendi* was granted to a woman, for the first time in the John Casimir University in Lwów. After she was refused the degree, Polackówna endeavoured to obtain the qualification at the University of Poznań. Apart from moral satisfaction, receiving her *habilitation* there did not change much in her professional life; she continuously worked at the archive and lectured, on a commissioned basis, in sigillography and auxiliary sciences within a single trimester at her friendly Poznań university.

It seems that along the path of her career, Polackówna was growing ever more aware of the differences in treating scientists and their development opportunities informed by the gender. This is clear based on her letters to her friends and superiors, where she often expresses her reflections in an anecdotal, perverse form. She also referred in her letters to her workplace – the Lwów archive – and the role of women thereat, as well as in the world of science. She thus wrote to Oswald Balcer, her superior and conducive tutor: “And, to make you, Sir, satisfied because of a woman’s ability of not only puzzling over things at the Academy but also about her interest in fine arts, I went straight from the Academy [i.e. the PAU, in Cracow] to a hosiery depot in order to choose a blouse, a cap, and a pair of tricot gloves for [my trip to] Zakopane ... I guess that after I left, the archive grew distinguished and purely masculine in appearance – and I would not even doubt that work is rumbling [*sic*] in there”.<sup>65</sup>

Polackówna certainly realised how significant her arguments and proposed statements were, and how important her effort as a historian

<sup>64</sup> Stefan Ciara, ‘Co byloby gdyby... Helena Polackówna (1881–1942) habilitowała się na Uniwersytecie Lwowskim?’, in Леонід Запшкільняк and Павел Серженги (eds.), *Історія та історики у Львівському університеті: традиції та сучасність* (Львів [L'viv], 2015), 257–64.

<sup>65</sup> I am indebted to Dr Volodymyr Dolynovs'kyi for having granted me access to the manuscript correspondence between Helena Polackówna and Oswald Balzer. A book entitled “*Dziękuję bardzo za list i za łaskawą pamięć*”... *Korespondencja Heleny Polackówny i Oswalda Balzera*, ed. by Volodymyr Dolynovs'kyi, is due to be issued in Poland.

was. But, can she be viewed as fully 'integrated' with her contemporary milieu of historians? Her own letters are evidence that, as a scientist and intellectual, she was treated as a *curiosum* by some of her colleagues. She summarised the rejection of her postdoctoral submission to Balzer in the following words: "Since the beginning, until this very moment, my regard of my *habilitation* could have not been other than an act of lawlessness committed against me, only because I cannot, and indeed am not willing to, enslave with 'cap and mash and salt, etc.' [referring to a Polish adage] those whom I deep down consider to be perverse individuals, or simply fools, and whom I despise. I am positive that there would have occurred no contrivance of antifeminism in case somebody else were being concerned, with a different character and political views, even with lower scientific requirements".<sup>66</sup> In a letter to a Poznań colleague, Oswald Balcer wrote of what had happened in terms of Lwów professors' reluctance toward Polackówna: "This, of course, could not have occurred for substantive or scientific reasons; other motives have come into play, which some of the members did not conceal: antifeminist sentiments in this field. ... I believed that I could reassure her [i.e. Polackówna] that the issue of sex will not be a resolving moment when it comes, in Poznań, to evaluating the qualifications for a scientific profession".<sup>67</sup> The importance and power of the network of professorial pacts and the concepts of gender order represented in them is noticeable in this case.

Polackówna's problems with the *habilitation* overlapped with those generated by the public administration. In the 1930s, during the economic depression, once civil servants had their salaries reduced, she was re-classed into a lower emolument group, joining her junior and less experienced colleagues who, as she described it, "were only making their first steps in the archive, whilst I have to my credit had a number of scholarly studies and pieces of archival work. I can understand that both of them find the situation pretty awkward, too ... and that they have begun making endeavours, which, being males, they find easier to do, and so they will doubtlessly be successful".<sup>68</sup> With her classification as what was emolument

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<sup>66</sup> Quoted after Mazurczak, 'Kariery akademickie', 132.

<sup>67</sup> Personal records of Helena Polackówna, Archive of the Adam Mickiewicz University, class. no. 148/43.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted after Stefan Ciara, 'Co byłoby gdyby', 264.

group VII, Polaczkówna attained the top level for a woman employed as a civil servant (together with some two hundred other female officials), since groups I to IV were unattainable to women while females were represented also in the lowest ones, i.e. VIII–XII.<sup>69</sup> That experiences of this kind, as far as women in science are concerned, are universal, is attested by the German zoologist Rhoda Erdmann, who at the very same time diagnosed the gender order prevailing in the academic structures; she namely found that “a woman researcher, with her studies completed, finds it hard to gain a living income and pursue research at the same time. ... If she however becomes a scientific assistant, she would then be required to burden herself with routine duties and relieve men scientists from the everyday routine at the laboratory; to a degree larger than the others, to devote her powers and time to didactics, looking after the doctoral studies, keeping order within the institute, ensuring the functioning of the library, dealing with the accounting, and with a number of other naturally indispensable efforts, which renders research activity difficult, if not impossible, for her. ... A woman finds it doubly more difficult to show to the world her own reflections, inventions and discoveries. A professionally active woman, one who studies or does her research, has to overcome the competition of not only the other women but also the competition against men: a combat that oftentimes is concealed under the encasement of daily civility. ... The atmosphere in the scientific institutes is not favourable to women researchers. I am referring to it from the standpoint of twenty-two years of my experience”.<sup>70</sup>

Both as individual and a group, when confronted with the university standards, the female *homines academici* had an outsider status and were made, in multiple ways, conform to the existing and established framework order. An open question is, to what extent these integration and assimilation processes have been concluded.<sup>71</sup> Their careers as well as their reflections attest to their awareness of the limitations and restrictions caused by gender in the academic environment;

<sup>69</sup> Michał Pietrzak, ‘Sytuacja prawna kobiet w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej’, in Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarc (eds.) *Równe prawa i nierówne szanse. Kobiety w Polsce międzywojennej* (Warszawa, 2000), 79.

<sup>70</sup> Rhoda Erdmann, ‘Ausbildungstyp weiblicher Forscher’, in Elga Kern (ed.), *Führende Frauen Europas* (Berlin, 1933), 35, 52.

<sup>71</sup> Stefanie Stegmann, “... got the look!” – *Wissenschaft und ihr Outfit. Eine kulturwissenschaftliche Studie über Effekte von Habitus, Fachkultur und Geschlecht* (Münster, 2005).



consequently, they were required to observe the social norms and roles afforded to them, transferred as they were into the scientific environment. All in all, they were confronted in their daily work with these traditional and solidified patterns and concepts, and were accordingly restricted by the imposed allocation of roles.

## V

## CONCLUSION

The academic gender order did not significantly deviate in the Polish context after 1918 from the European pattern, from the disseminated and practiced concepts in respect of the role and place of both sexes/genders in society, the world, and science. The academia was a peculiar laboratory where innovative topics, subject-matters and research methods clashed in the daily (co)existence against the attitudes of researchers towards the new social and cultural challenges. Looking for an apt description of the status of the generation of pioneering women researchers, I would consider the phrase 'tolerated status' adequate: it means that the phenomenon and the trends in science have been noticed, regulations simplifying (or, at least, no more barring) the access for women adopted. The recognition on the part of the 'accepting circles' was, for a change, far from Honeth's ideal of recognition across the three planes of people-to-people contacts.

In the period in question, the legally sanctioned exclusion – in line with the 'yea for doctorate, nay for postdoctoral' rule – was replaced by the actual exclusion along the lines of 'yea for postdoctoral, nay for professorship'.<sup>72</sup> This obstacle, no more with a legal anchoring, long remained unaffected. The mechanisms of functioning of science emphatically demonstrate that in the in 1920s and 1930s the real problem was exclusion of women from the academic system, rather than their university studies or their status as female students.<sup>73</sup> Acquisition of knowledge did not ensure access to power, in terms of position in the academic environment, entering the structures of

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<sup>72</sup> Vogt, *Vom Hintereingang*, 17, 197.

<sup>73</sup> Theresa Wobbe, 'Von Marianne Weber zur Edith Stein: Historische Koordinaten des Zugangs zu Wissenschaft', in Gesa Lindemann and Theresa Wobbe (eds.), *Denkachsen. Zur theoretischen und institutionellen Rede vom Geschlecht* (Frankfurt am Main, 1994), 44.

scientific policy and, consequently, holding representative or prestigious functions connected with decision-making distinctions (professor, dean, rector). In its institutional form, social and cultural dimension, science was organised in a way that excluded women from partaking in power and authority: in power/authority of knowledge, to be specific.

The verse excerpt quoted at the beginning may serve as a poetic punch-line: what it refers to is mutual incoherence of prescribed law and the daily life of academia and its power structures. Being a technical measure, the regulations, liberal and progressive in their spirit, could not ensure equal opportunities to female citizens, academic citizens included.

*trans. Tristan Korecki*

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**Iwona Dadej** – 19th- and 20th-century history of social movements, women’s and gender history, history of science; assistant professor at the Institute of History, Polish Academy of Sciences; e-mail: idadej@ihpan.edu.pl