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EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS OF WOMEN IN THE KINGDOM OF POLAND AT THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

A thorough examination of the topic mentioned in the title is not an easy task considering the absence of detailed investigations. At the present-day stage of research it is possible to formulate several remarks, proposals and questions as well as initial conclusions, limited to the 1864–1905 period. An attempt at a holistic interpretation would signify the necessity of writing a new book, analogous to the excellent work by Jan Hulewicz entitled The Question of the Higher Education of Women in the Nineteenth Century (Kraków 1939). Our observation should pertain to the reception of the education ideas, characterised by that author, and their acceptance or rejection by the intelligentsia in the Kingdom of Poland. Such a task encounters certain obstacles brought about by the available source material. The number of sources which would provide satisfactory answers to inquiries concerning educational models and aspirations is small; naturally, these sources were produced by individuals, actively engaged either on the side of the supporters and adherents of emancipation, or those belonging to the opposite camp, and thus in a certain way not typical and by no means average. Rarely are the "educational ideals" of the professional intelligentsia described; mention is rather made of the "enlightened strata", that is, including the landowners and the educated bourgeoisie. It is also difficult to depart from an analysis of views for the sake of studying attitudes, and to acknowledge that both are to a certain measure correlated. In the first place, this is not always the case; after all, life is affected more by the pressure of necessity than by the dictate of wishes. In the second place, also in this instance, the source reflect rather the attitudes and activities which shocked public opinion, drew attention to themselves and met with the approval or criticism of the "activists", in particular publicists, male and female, engaged in the "women's question". Traditional or moderate attitudes could go unnoticed. At times, we find about them from their critics, who reveal a natural inclination towards an insufficient appreciation or exaggeration of the attacked phenomena. All these difficulties are faced by anyone who wished to tackle the problem of the reception of social thought or, in a narrower interpretation, paedagogic thought.

The chronological range of the observations coincides with the era of positivism and its crisis, the first stage of the emergence of political parties, the serious economic progress in the Kingdom of Poland, a final shaping of capitalistic relations, and, at the same time, with a "grassroots" development of the democratization of the intelligentsia, and its growth, especially in Warsaw. The parallel pauperization of the landowners to a considerable extent swelled the ranks of the intelligentsia. Due to the Russification policy pursued by the partitioning power, the Poles were partially eliminated from schools, administration and courts, in a word, from all public services. This was the reason why the intelligentsia, which gradually grew more numerous, disclosed an untypical structure — a proportionately larger group of persons than e.g. in Galicia, worked in private institutions and on their own account; the number of the unemployed members of the intelligentsia or those "employed part time" as we would put it today, was considerable.

It would not be purposeful to repeat the response of the Warsaw positivists to the challenge of knowledge and work, the cult of practicism, a partial reception of the slogans of liberalism and a theory of the organic development of society which i.a. called for the emancipation, education and "productivisation of women". Such demands for the participation of women in social issues, for making decisions about their own fate and joining men at least in certain professions also concealed a patriotic message. Similarly to the civilizational promotion of the peasants and the assimilation of the Jews, women's emancipation was to multiply the number of "conscious citizens of the country", a fact about which it was difficult to write and speak outright in the prevalent political conditions. It should be also borne in mind that the emancipation slogans and patterns came from Western Europe and did not necessarily have to be directly connected with that what we know as Warsaw positivism. Moreover, the ideological make-up of the people who postulated a change in the social position and role of women differed, just as did their proposals: from timid suggestions about raising the level of education within the framework of heretofore models, educational and moral, to a moderate programme propounded by the popular women's periodical "Bluszcz" ("Ivy"), the more radical, feminist groups connected with the writers Eliza Orzeszkowa and Maria Konopnicka, up to the socialist variant of solving dilemmas, revolutionary in its approach towards the existing ideas and social praxis.

Undoubtedly, the majority of the propagators of all programmes whose integral component included various educational models, included representatives of the intelligentsia — publicists who either professionally or passingly pursued literature. This is, and must be the case, in situations when political ideas are created, a domain, after all, for men of letters. Persons with professional practice, and in particular teachers, spoke out more rarely. On the other hand, we deal rather often with a combination of both those roles, an excellent example being Narcyza Żmichowska, a spokeswoman for moderate

emancipation, a representative of the earlier generation who died in 1876, and a celebrated teacher and author.

To whom were those emancipation postulates addressed and what was their reception? Both their contemporaries and later scholars noticed the considerable popularity of publications on "women's" topics although not by any means connected with cooking and beauty advice. Eliza Orzeszkowa wrote: "This phenomenon is testified by the exceptionally rapid sale of periodicals which deal with their [women's] issues... John Stuart Mill, Legouve, Laboulaye, Daubie and Paul Leroy Bealieu are read by more or less the whole intelligent class of women, often in the original, and more frequently in a translation". The same can be said about the writings of the author of that statement — her essay: A Few Words on Women appeared in 1871 in the "Tygodnik Mód i Powieści" ("The Weekly of Vogues and Novels"), and simultaneously as a brochure whose next edition was published already in 1874. The rather militant feminist "Świt" ("The Dawn"), edited by Maria Konopnicka, however, ceased appearing three years after its inauguration in 1884, but this was already a slightly later period when competition on the Warsaw press market grew considerably, and the "women's question" seemed to have temporarily become less fashionable.

It follows from the above remarks that the spiritual nurture prepared for the adherents of women's emancipation was intended for educated recipients, capable of absorbing often complicated contents. Emancipation itself was almost exclusively a question which interested the "enlightened strata" — attention was frequently drawn to the fact that there were no problems of a moral nature connected with the employment of women among the lower classes, and that peasant and working class women even worked too hard². On the other hand, one of the obstacles limiting the employment of some of the women of intelligentsia of landowning origin in professions demanding manual labour, favoured by the positivists, was their physical nonresilience and frailty. Bolesław Prus, for example, was inclined to postpone the opening of a gardening school for girls until "sensible physical education has developed for the fair sex that physical stamina which today it does not possess"³.

Despite those reservations, manual as well as lighter and relatively highly skilled work seemed to constitute for the positivists, at least during the first stage of their publicistic activity, a universal panaceum for the problems faced by women representing the impoverished landowners and intelligentsia. This type of labour was to have been primarily connected with the crafts: clothesmaking,

E. Orzeszkowa, O kobiecie (On Woman), Warszawa 1891, p. 40-41.

² B. Prus, Kroniki (Chronicles), vol. VII, Warszawa 1958, p. 15— "Kurier Warszawski", no 20, 20 January 1884. Cf. S. Kowalska-Glikman, Kobiety w procesie przemian społecznych w Królestwie Polskim w XIX wieku (Women in the Process of Social Changes in the Kingdom of Poland during the Nineteenth Century), in: Kobieta a społeczeństwo na ziemiach polskich w XIX wieku (The Woman and Society in Polish Lands during the Nineteenth Century), ed. by A. Zarnowska and A. Szwarc, Warszawa 1990, p. 15-16.

³ B. Prus, op. cit., p. 16.

millinery, the production of artificial flowers, sometimes bookbinding etc. Such a postulate remained in accordance with an economic programme which declared that small enterprises should be placed in the forefront. The positivists remained rather suspicious of large industrial enterprises and great capital⁴.

After the introductory, publicistic stage, the time had come for deeds. As Jan Hulewicz found, the propaganda at the turn of the 1880s, contributed to a veritable fashion for women's education and employment in the craft. From 1872 to 1882 in Warsaw itself there appeared as many as eight crafts enterprises for women, of which the largest and most significant was the Joint Company of Women's Labour and Craft Enterprise belonging to Edward Łojko, and the Industrial-Crafts Enterprise for Women established by Cecylia Plater-Zyberk (subsequently changed into a school of rural housekeeping and a comprehensive secondary school)⁵. Several years later, it became apparent that the graduates of these training courses and workshops which originally enjoyed great popularity, gradually deteriorated and many were ultimately closed due to a lack of candidates. This was the case in Warsaw (i.a. the same fate befell the enterprise founded by Edward Łojko) and in the provinces, e.g. in Kalisz where in 1874 a crafts workshop for women was conducted by Aleksandra Parczewska (the headmistress of a girls' school) and her daughter Melania (later a well-known social activist) was received enthusiastically but lasted for only seven years.

Both of the mentioned educational–production institutions relied on clients from so–called high society, and it was this milieu which maintained them at the beginning. Of the total of 1,043 girls in Łojko's workshop, 37.5 per cent were from landowners' families and about 45 per cent of intelligentsia origin⁶. In the workshop belonging to the Parczewski family, of the 49 girls whose origin is known, 22 came from intelligentsia families (once again not more than a half) followed by daughters of landowners or ex–landowners (probably not very prosperous) who numbered 16 girls⁷.

The "over-representation" of the intelligentsia is, therefore, distinct — let us compare the above mentioned data with the barely few per cent of white collar workers among all the employees in the Kingdom of Poland, not to mention the percentage of women in that group, which in Warsaw, a leading

⁴ A. Jaszczuk, Spór pozytywistów z konserwatystami o przyszłość Polski 1870–1903 (The Controversy between the Positivists and Conservatists concerning the Future of Poland, 1870–1903), Warszawa 1986, p. 145 sqq.

⁵ J. Hulewicz, Sprawa wyższego wykształcenia kobiet w wieku XIX (The Question of the Higher Education of Women in the Nineteenth Century), Kraków 1939, p. 15–156; cf. M. Dobrowolska, Wychowanie dziewcząt na ziemiach polskich u schylku XIX w. (The Education of Girls in Polish Lands at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century), in: Historia wychowania (The History of Education), vol. II, ed. by Ł. Kurdybacha, Warszawa 1962, p. 676.

⁶ J. Hulewicz, op. cit., p. 155-156.

⁷ S. Kowalska-Glikman, op. cit., p. 18; cf. E. Polanowski, W dawnym Kaliszu. Szkice z życia miasta 1850-1914 (In Old Kalisz. Sketches of the Town's Life 1850-1914), Poznań 1979, p. 216-218.

town in that respect, wavered between 4,4 and 5,2 per cent according to survey data from 1882 and 18978.

Was this merely a question of a fashion which rapidly faded? One could cite some tens of opinions which declared that the prime motive for the emancipation—oriented strivings of women was the necessity of earn a living, increasingly strongly experienced in the families of former landowners and the impoverished intelligentsia. Viewing this problem from the perspective of 1904, Jadwiga Marcinkowska, one of the moderate feminists, wrote: "Only as regards the more conscious middle classes and so—called intelligentsia, did there take place a struggle between traditional views and the life necessity, an exchange of views and discussion, all of which did not stop necessity from steering human deeds, as in the poorer strata, while the battle of opinions only set human tongues into motion"9.

Attempts were made also in the domain of trade, which enjoyed a smaller support of public opinion but frequently proved to be more successful. In his description of Kalisz in the mid-1870s the Warsaw journalist, Jan Jeleński, considered it important to mention that "The wives of civil servants, Mrs Zawistowska and Mrs Marczewska, and Miss Benowska, a daughter of a civil servant, own clothes shops which they manage personally", but did not comment on this fact¹⁰. In turn, in a small town of Słupca, the seat of the county office, the wives of several of its employees jointly set up a sweet shop¹¹. The number of such undertakings, not advertised in the press, must have been greater. Relatively frequently women managed bookshops, an occupation which, apart from a familiarity with rules of trade, required a certain general education. From 1864 to 1914 we come across 17 women among the 87 persons dealing in book-seller trade in the gubernia of Kalisz¹². It is true that at times these were widows who inherited the "workshop" of their husbands, but they also included wives of officials, some with literary ambitions such as Antonina Idzikowska.

Apparently "life necessity" really did compel many women from the "intelligentsia" to pursue trade and the crafts. This movement probably would not have achieved such dimensions if the rather obstinate propaganda had not introduced (although not for long) certain elements of an education model, different from the traditional vision of the woman–wife–mother, the "priestess

⁸ M. Nietyksza, Przemiany aktywności zawodowej kobiet. Warszawa na przełomie XIX i XX wieku (Transformations in the Professional Activity of Women. Warsaw at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century), in: Kobieta i społeczeństwo, p. 150.

J. M [arcinkowska], Wartość społeczna kobiet (The Social Worth of Women), in: Kobieta współczesna. Książka zbiorowa (Contemporary Woman. Collected Work), Warszawa 1904, p. 2-3.
J. Jeleński, Kalisz i jego okolice (Kalisz and Its Environs), Warszawa 1975, p. 9.

¹¹ State Archive in Łódź, Kancelaria Gubernatora kaliskiego (The chancellery of the Governor of Kalisz), 316, k. 2.

¹² M. J. Lech, Księgarze i księgamie w Królestwie Polskim 1869–1905. Materiały ze źródeł archiwalnych (Bookshop Owners and Bookshops in the Kingdom of Poland, 1869–1905. Material from Archive Sources), Warszawa 1980, p. 19–25.

of the home fire", but also quite distant from the intelligentsia-inspired cult of higher and general education. This last model began to dominate in the 1880s, when, and here I once again base myself on the work by Hulewicz, the emancipation movement ceased to be fascinated with the crafts in favour of higher education for women¹³.

This was a much more elitist offer; it is unnecessary to stress how difficult it was to become a female student of the turn of the nineteenth century, either in one of the Swiss or French universities or even at a higher girls' school in Petersburg. It was necessary not only to overcome prejudices and legal obstacles, but also to obtain the money. In the future, detailed investigations based on previously prepared biographical files will make it possible to determine the high percentage of representatives of the intelligentsia among the first generation of Polish women who achieved higher education. For the purposes of this study, I tried to examine more closely the strict elite — the most celebrated women scholars. With this goal in mind, I made use of the existing volumes of the Biogrammes of Polish Scholars which list members of the Academy of Skills, The Polish Academy of Skills, the Warsaw Scientific Society and the Polish Academy of Sciences. One must remain aware of the fact that this operation cannot be regarded as a poll; the reservations which investigators into the history of the intelligentsia express as regards of exploitation of biographical publications for drawing conclusions about the entire stratum are quite correct. In this case, however, we are concerned not with a stratum but with a group of outstanding scholars.

The list in question contains 915 persons of which there are 25 women. It appears that 9 of them were born in the Russian partition area between 1870 and 1890. Some of the women came from intelligentsia families (two daughters of civil servants, two of medical doctors, and one each of an engineer and a teacher), while the remaining came from families of landowners. Biographical information pertaining to all the persons in question is similar — in their youth they studied with the support (often more of a moral than financial nature) of their families, made great sacrifices and lived sometimes in conditions of dire poverty, earning a living by giving lessons. There immediately comes to mind the lifestory of Maria Skłodowska—Curie who is not on the list since she did not fulfil the required formal criteria of its authors. The future famous scholar collected money for studying in Paris i.a. as a governess in a gentry manorhouse; she also financially supported her older sister who became a medical doctor¹⁴.

The number of women who harboured higher educational aspirations and scientific ambitions was obviously quite small. This model of a career, however, must have been attractive not only for the group of future scientists, as testified

¹³ J. Hulewicz, op. cit., p. 190 sqq.

¹⁴ E. Curie, *Madame Curie. Leben und Wirken*, Wien 1937 (French ed. Paris 1938, Polish ed. Warszawa 1939, English ed. London 1947).

by certain literary works, to recall the autobiographical fragments of *Nights and Days* which describe the student years of the author, Maria Dąbrowska.

The popularity of such a model is confirmed by data referring to the Warsaw Flying University. They are, naturally, far from precise but everything indicates that here the role of women was enormous. Let us recall, following the example of Halina Kiepurska and Dionizja Wawrzykowska–Wierciochowa, that the whole organization work of this underground higher school of learning from the turn of the nineteenth century was performed by women, who were less threatened with eventual repressions by the tsarist authorities than men. The Flying University had at its disposal a base composed of a number of official scientific reading rooms for women, and although it is impossible to determine exactly the proportions between men and women students, according to certain estimates the latter comprises as much as 70 per cent. Not in vain was this institution commonly known as a "girls' university" 15.

Obviously, men profited from clandestine higher education much less frequently than women since they enjoyed other opportunities, and because such education did not provide formal foundations for commencing a professional career. For women, however, attendance of the courses in the Flying University was not a question of snobbery or a wish to solve the problem of free time. The overwhelming majority of pertinent information found in diaries, even if they were affected by a tendency towards an idealization of the events described, indicates patriotic motivation and a desire to win the highest possible qualification for social and paedagogic work. Clearly, the ethos of the Warsaw left-wing and democratic intelligentsia from the turn of the century, described upon many occasions, and sometimes presented incorrectly as universally binding for the whole social group¹⁶, was attractive for a considerable part of the young generation of women from this stratum. Presumably, the generation of parents did not always accept it; regardless of the views held, the perspective of sharing the fate of the Strong One from Stefan Żeromski's novel or her model — the left-wing teacher and social activist Faustyna Morzycka — was not an encouraging vision for a daughter's life and career.

Relatively early, in the years preceding the January Uprising, the approval of the intellectual elites and "reading public" was won by female authors, although the popularity of the most celebrated such as Klementyna Hoffmanowa, *de domo* Tańska, Narcyza Żmichowska, Paulina Wilkońska or Jadwiga Łuszczewska–Deotyma did not equal that enjoyed by their male colleagues. The last decade of the nineteenth century multiplied the number of women

¹⁵ D. Wawrzykowska-Wierciochowa, Udział kobiet w tajnym i jawnym ruchu społeczno-kulturalnym w Warszawie w latach 1880–1914 (The Participation of Women in the Clandestine and Legal Socio-Cultural Movement in Warsaw in the Years 1880–1914), in: Zdziejów książki i bibliotek w Warszawie (From the History of Books and Libraries in Warsaw), Warszawa 1961, p. 305–306.

¹⁶ Cf. J. Żurawicka, Inteligencja warszawska w końcu XIX wieku (The Warsaw Intelligentsia at the End of the Nineteenth Century), Warszawa 1978.

writers of the Kingdom of Poland, sometimes not of an exceptionally high level, journalists specializing in women's topics and authors of series of romances and works intended for children. Volumes XIII—XVI of the *Bibliography of Polish Literature*—the "New Korbut" which deal with "Literature of Positivism and Young Poland" present 468 biogrammes of men of letters from that period, including 62 women (13,4 per cent) born between 1830 and 1890. Of this group, 35 came from families of landowners, 23—from the intelligentsia, and 4 from other social strata. This domination of the landowning milieu is characteristic—writing did not require formal education, and could have been the occupation of young ladies from a manorhouse, well—read and intelligent, with free time at their disposal, gifted with a certain dose of literary talent. Moreover, the generation living between the November and January Uprising clearly demonstrates a superiority of educated landowners as a social elite, and the relative weakness of the intelligentsia.

The domination of female writers of gentry origin, however, declines if we divide them into persons born prior to and after 1870. The first group includes 12 women from intelligentsia households, and 28 from families of landowners. In the second group the situation reverses, and here writers of intelligentsia origin totalled 11 persons, while those from landowning families — 7 women. In the course of time, therefore, women whose fathers were engaged in intellectual work although in their youth could have been members of the landowning stratum, clearly began to preponderate in the domain of literature.

Let us now leave the elites. The overwhelming majority of educated women who embarked upon intellectual occupations in the nineteenth century became teachers. Should one conclude from this fact that such was their ideal? We know the examples of such women as Maria Skłodowska-Curie that this was certainly not the case. For some it could have been either a sad necessity or a good point of departure for the above mentioned social and patriotic activity. The common nature of the phenomenon was perceived already at the time, and frequently severely criticised. Writing about the universal "lessons given" by practically the whole Warsaw intelligentsia, Iza Moszczeńska stressed that this was done by "women of all professions as well as those without professional qualifications; in a word, all those who learned anything, teach others"¹⁷. According to official data, in the years 1882 and 1897 44.8 and 44.6 per cent of women employees in Warsaw worked in "education and upbringing"18. To this one should add practically the entire clandestine school system which, according to narrative sources, was extremely feminised. This phenomenon is confirmed, nota bene, by fragmentary police data — in the county of Kalisz, for instance, during the 1889s and 1890s persons fined for or outright "caught" engaged in illegal teaching of children in the Polish language were

¹⁷ I. Moszczeńska, Nasza szkoła w Królestwie Polskim. Uwagi na czasie (Our School in the Kingdom of Poland. Current Remarks), Lwów 1905, p. 21.

¹⁸ M. Nietyksza, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

almost exlusively women¹⁹, a fact indicating once again the considerable degree of patriotic motivation in educational aspirations and the drive towards teaching careers. It is true that paedagogic work was a form of professional activization for women, which was accepted both by the "new" and "traditional" morality, and that a woman teaching children did not encounter the same legal obstacles and male hostility as her colleagues who undertook work in other fields. Finally, it is true that an important role was played by economic aspects. But the old model survived — paedagogics, after all, was regarded as the natural vocation of women, and high esteem for the dissemination of knowledge proclaimed by the positivists continued to exert an impact. All these features seemed to be harmoniously intermingled and explain the considerable number of women teachers. In the years 1864-1905 girls' schools, this time official and not clandestine, developed relatively quickly while the number of secondary boys' schools barely increased. This was the case in both sectors: state, where new secondary girls' schools appeared (let us recall that the reform introduced in 1862 by Aleksander Wielopolski did not foresee such institutions) but, above all, in the private sector. The expansion of private schools on almost all levels of education is truly impressive²⁰. Girls of intelligentsia descent profited from those schools which could offer the most. Romana Pachucka reminisced: "Girls who came from the families of craftsmen, the daughters of factory masters, petty traders and sometimes of the more prosperous workers attended two- and three-grade schools. In the four-grade schools the girls were recruited from the petty bourgeoisie, wealthier and with greater aspirations, and from the less well-off landowners [...] The six-grade schools concentrated the elite from the wealthiest bourgeoisie, the prosperous gentry, the intelligentsia and the financially worse-off girls who were ambitious and talented, and who were permitted to pay lower entrance fees"21.

Scholars who examine the intelligentsia from the earlier period draw attention to the very high degree of self-reproduction of this social stratum. Already at the beginning of its existence when it was still very small, there appeared members of the intelligentsia in the second generation, the off-spring of intellectuals. Quite often one observes the phenomenon of inheriting the profession of the father — hence the whole "dynasties" of physicians, academic professors or lawyers. All those findings reffered to men, adults and youth, who were the only persons that could be taken into account at least up to the 1870s.

¹⁹ The State Archive in Kalisz. Zarząd Powiatu kaliskiego (Office of the County of Kalisz), 604, 513, 612, 622. Cf. A. Szwarc, Polskie "warstwy oświecone" w Kaliskiem po powstaniu styczniowym i ich aktywność społeczno-kulturalna (1863–1890), (The Polish "Enlightened Strata" in the Kalisz Region following the January Uprising and Their Socio-Cultural Activity (1863–1890)), Warszawa 1978, p. 447 (PhD manuscript in the Library of the Institute of History at Warsaw University).

²⁰ Cf. D. Wawrzykowska-Wierciochowa, Z dziejów tajnych pensji żeńskich w Królestwie Polskim (From the History of Clandestine Girls' Secondary Schools in the Kingdom of Poland), "Rozprawy z Dziejów Oświaty", vol. X, 1967, p. 108-160.

²¹ R. Pachucka, *Pamiętniki 1886–1914 (Diaries 1886–1914*), Wrocław 1958, p. 21.

In deliberations on the casues of this phenomenon, explanations were sought in common sense. Thus, note was made of the impact of the environment, which pursued intellectual professions, the possession of book collections, the family habit of reading the press and books etc. The emerging ethos of the intelligentsia, in which knowledge and education became the prime or at least very important value was also indicated²². It seems that such educational models and aspirations with time were embraced also by the young women, parallelly or at least with a slight delay. This thesis, of course, calls for verification in the course of further extensive research

(Translated by Aleksandra Rodzińska-Chojnowska)

²² R. Czepulis-Rastenis, Wzór osobowy inteligenta polskiego w świetle wspomnień pośmiertnych (1863–1872) (The Personality Model of a Member of the Polish Intelligentsia in the Light of Posthumous Reminiscences (1863–1872)), in: eadem, Ludzie nauki i talentu. Studia o świadomości społecznej inteligencji polskiej w zaborze rosyjskim (People of Science and Talent. Studies on the Social Consciousness of the Polish Inteligentsia in the Russian Poland), Warszawa 1988, p. 297–328.