

# CHRONICLE

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‘Łucja Charewiczowa’ Seminar in History of Women and Gender,  
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“The gender of historical protagonists seems to be, if anything, an awareness-informing factor and a driver behind action only for the female part of society and in female-dominated spheres”.<sup>1</sup> This, not too optimistic, statement made by a German historian some twenty years ago seems still valid, at least in the Polish context. Although the category of ‘(cultural) gender’ is increasingly in use, there is still no platform (in spite of the scientific paradigm’s popularity *and* politicisation) that would attract the scholarly milieu to enable flow of knowledge and exchange of experiences between history researchers.

In our search of an individual who, owing to her calibre as a scholar, would well serve as a patron for our project, we have quickly chosen Łucja Charewiczowa (1897–1943), a historian active in the interwar period in Łwów. It was her who, a representative of Polish academic milieu, postulated that scholarly research be pursued into history of women, and made part of historical discourse for good, taking local and national context into account. For a brief biography of this historian and a list of her major publications, please refer to the Archive section in this issue of *APH*.

In October 2017, we initiated the ‘Łucja Charewiczowa’ Seminar in History of Women and Gender. The Seminar was organised as a series of cyclical meetings, each including a lecture and workshop discussions or a panel discussion, at which advanced doctoral or postdoctoral (*habilitation*) projects are discussed, including on the basis of the work in progress (as previously distributed among the participants). The meetings are held on a quarterly basis, usually at the seat of the Warsaw Scientific Society.

In our Seminar work we focus on the tradition behind its scholar-patron and her own achievements, but there is more to it. Some of the attendees can very well remember the meetings and discussions as part of the informal ‘Anna Żarnowska School’, inaugurated in the 1990s by the Warsaw-based historian. The intellectual community once gathered around Professor Żarnowska commenced what developed into a long-term project of research into the history of women in Polish territories in, primarily, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in a comparative context. The nine-volume publication based on

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<sup>1</sup> Gunilla Friederike Budde, ‘Das Geschlecht der Geschichte’, in Thomas Mergeland and Thomas Welskopp (eds.), *Geschichte zwischen Kultur und Gesellschaft. Beiträge zur Theoriedebatte* (München, 1997), 125–50; esp. 125.

the project, entitled *Kobieta i ...* [A Woman and...], functions to this day as an exemplary accomplishment of Polish historiography focused on women.<sup>2</sup>

The Seminar seeks to exchange knowledge between researchers dealing with history of women and sex/gender in Poland, Europe, and internationally. Our major purpose is that Polish research in the areas of history of women and cultural history of gender be made part of international historical circulation. Our goal is also to consolidate the national circle of male and female historians dealing with the areas of scientific reflection in question and to popularise new, innovative and/or critical research paradigms. We offer participation in our meetings primarily to the circle of historians, aware and firmly believing that modern research in gender, as a broad concept, extend to all the humanistic disciplines. We thus endeavour to make the discussions with representatives of the other disciplines contribute to the broadening of research perspectives, widening the fields of study, formulating new questions with use of diverse methodological tools. We want historical research to become a source of inspiration for our colleagues dealing with literary studies, anthropology, ethnology, sociology, and other areas – rather than remaining limited to facts-based knowledge of use.

At the inauguration meeting on 19 October 2017, the biography and accomplishments of Łucja Charewiczowa was evoked in a paper delivered by Olga Gul, a Lviv historian. It is worth emphasising that in Lviv, now part of Ukraine – formerly, Lwów in Poland – interest in Charewiczowa's works is considerable, as attested by the studies of the speaker herself, who is presently working on a book on our patroness. Subsequently, Dietlind Hüchtker (GWZO, Leipzig) delivered a paper entitled 'At woman-historian's workhouse: Reflections on performance, performativity, and politics. Austrian Galicia and its political movements used as an example'. The lecture, based on her postdoctoral thesis 'Politics as performance. Political movements in Austrian Galicia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century',<sup>3</sup> rendered the listeners acquainted with the challenges, difficulties, and achievements in implementation of new perspectives – specifically, the performance turn, in research on history of gender and women, including in regard of East Central Europe.

The meeting of February 2018 discussed the past and the future of history of women and gender in the global scale and in the Polish perspective. Knowledge on female creators/inspirers of research paradigms is gradually

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<sup>2</sup> Grażyna Szelągowska, 'Professor Anna Żarnowska (1931–2007). Obituary and selected Bibliography', in *aspasia. The International Yearbook of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European Women's and Gender History*, ii (2008), 271–81, doi:10.3167/asp.2008.020122 (11 June 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Dietlind Hüchtker, *Geschichte als Performance. Politische Bewegungen in Galizien um 1900* (Frankfurt am Main and New York, 2014); see review in this issue.

becoming historicised in a number of countries worldwide; their scholarly and institutional output is an object of historical analyses, whilst their biographies and publications turn out to be a buoyant motion-picture material. Fragments of Renata Keller's documentary *Why Women Need to Climb Mountains – A Journey of Discovery with Dr. Gerda Lerner* has become for us, along with Gerda Lerner's essays and biographical texts, a point of departure for the discussion on the past and the tomorrow of women's and gender history. To our mind, the private and professional life of this pioneer of historical research in feminist perspective are emblematic of the twentieth century. In the Polish context, it is easy to identify Lerner's counterparts, though they are certainly not as world-recognised (apart from Anna Żarnowska, let us mention Dionizja Wawrzykowska-Wierciochowa, author of outreach works on Polish heroines, the period of her intensive activity being the 1960s and 1970s). It would be worthwhile to create a tableau of Polish women historians who by means of their studies and research work lay the foundations for present-day history of women and history of gender in the local (countrywide) context. The discussion on the said film, and primarily on the past and the future of historical studies in the field of gender was attended by experts on historiography of women – Dobrochna Kałwa of the Historical Institute, University of Warsaw [IH UW]; Sylwia Wielichowska of Łódź's Museum of Independence Traditions; and, Tomasz Wiślicz of the Institute of History, Polish Academy of Sciences [IH PAN]. The discussion subjected to criticism the present development stage of the history of women and gender in Polish historiography; methodological weaknesses has been pointed out, along with association (in spite of increasing numbers of publications) with the history of women that shuns the conscious use of the category of gender, and scarce thematic and methodological, or theoretical, innovativeness. It was pointed out that history of gender is now a stabilised research current in Western Europe, one which makes use of other categories such as race or class, and interpenetrates with other research perspectives. Moreover, the category of gender is broadly used in historiography nowadays. The disputants expressed their expectation and wish for the gender perspective to become ubiquitous (*ubiquitär*) in scientific cognition, and for historians to be particularly sensitive to it – thus preventing a situation described in the opening quote of this report.

Let us add that on initiative of the Seminar, an international conference on 'Gender and the State. 100 years of the fight for equality in Central-Eastern Europe' will be held in November 2018 by Institute of History PAS, Institute of History, University of Warsaw, and German Historical Institute of Warsaw. On the centenary of the fought and won suffrage, we will discuss about the role of women as citizens and the stages of their empowerment, which has led to a change in the social position of both women and men – and thus, modernisation of society. In other words, our focus is the one hundred years of fighting for equal rights, where the occurrences of

November 1918 are seen as a point of departure in looking for methods of modern empowerment narration and for defining the position of women in State–society relations. The conference will deal with several cross-sectional problems – among them, strategies of women’s movement (local, transnational, international); the gender–labour relation; gender versus national identity; changes in public space; anti-feminist responses; and, the gender order after the 1989 transition.

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