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**Women who wore professor's gowns at the Institute of History, University of Lodz  
from 1945 to 1990**

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to trace the paths taken by Polish women to the place of their dreams that was a school of higher education. This pursuit is illustrated with examples of seven women who were granted the title of professor and bound their professional lives to the Institute of History of the University of Lodz between 1945 and 1990.

In order to create a fuller picture, a general outline of women's struggle for access to higher education is presented. This is due to the fact that for centuries they were not allowed to follow academic studies. This was the case not only in Poland, but also worldwide, and the situation did not change until 19<sup>th</sup> century, when women began their struggle for what today seems to be obvious and indisputable – the right to study at institutions of higher education. Said struggle for access to academic education constituted but one element of a broader process of women's strife for equal rights. However, it was a problem of a fundamental nature, as education to was a prerequisite for ensuring equal right also in other areas of life, such as e.g. participation in politics. Acquiring education first and foremost enabled women to work professionally, thus allowing them financial independence.

The examples of women who had managed to cross this line, such as Maria Skłodowska–Curie or Maria Zakrzewska, inspired multitudes of young female academic adepts. Nevertheless, the process of admitting women to institutions of higher education was a slow and reluctant one.

A breakthrough in this regard came in 1918, when Poland regained independence. Following the country's liberation, none of the Polish institutions of higher education chose to limit women's access to studies. With time, more and more women would acquire academic education. However, their access to certain professions was limited; this included the

profession of a university teacher. Initially, women were employed in supporting academic positions, yet over time the situation gradually improved. One could also notice a growing percentage of women completing studies in the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. However, this was not a smooth transition and required overcoming certain social barriers. Paving the ways – until recently entirely alien to women – to professional careers required unwavering enthusiasm, commitment and numerous sacrifices. This posed a particularly serious problem in the large industrial city that Lodz was at the time – a place which did not have a single institution of higher education prior to the country regaining its independence .

Establishment of a branch of the Free Polish University (*Wolna Wszechnica Polska*) in Lodz enabled women to both commence academic studies and undertake work as academic employees. Statistics from that time demonstrate that the percentage of women among students over the entire period of existence of the Lodz branch of the FPU reached nearly 40% and was showing upward tendencies. The outbreak of Second World War disrupted the process until the city's liberation. It was then that the University of Lodz was established along with several other schools of higher education where from the very beginning women made up a high percentage of both students and academic staff, especially supporting personnel.

One of them, professor N. Gąsiorowska - Grabowska, was the driving force behind creation of the Historical Institute in 1948 – a place which for a great number of years became a haven for both research and didactic work of the female professors whose fates are the subject of this thesis. Unlike the founder of the Historical Institute, who can be perceived as a professor of two universities (University of Lodz and University of Warsaw), the others were linked to the Lodz academic milieu throughout their professional lives.

These women represent different generations: from those born under the country's partition and occupation, through to the last years of the Second Polish Republic, they present a broad spectrum of differing, complex live paths, varying research interests and ideological and political stances. One must remember that the years 1945 – 1990 were the times of the People's Republic of Poland. The events of 1956, 1968, 1970 or 1981 also affected the Institute's activities and ability to operate. It was only at the very end of this period that changes occurred in the political system in 1989. These circumstances, clearly, had a great impact on the lives and work of the Institute's academic staff. Just like among the rest of the

society, some of them wholeheartedly supported the social and political structure of that time, some opposed it, and some chose to refrain from officially expressing any views.

Four of the seven faces of this thesis (Natalia Gąsiorowska -Grabowska, Gryzelda Missalowa, Barbara Wachowska, Alina Barszczewska-Krupa) were ardent supporters of the existing political system. They all helped create and develop it. As research demonstrates, they did so out of true conviction and belief that it was the right choice. They were active in various social and political organizations and were members of political parties (mainly Polish United Workers' Party, *PZPR*). Further, they encouraged their alumni and colleagues to join the same path. Their academic research to a great extent reflected their leftist views and constituted an implementation of the state-ordered methodology and official politics of memory. Despite this, a great number of their academic papers still remain important elements of Polish historiography.

For the other three (Helena Brodowska, Halina Evert-Kappes, Zofia Libiszowska), developing the ability to find their place in the new reality was a gradual process. They tried not to get too involved in politics and to avoid in their daily conversations any references to the times before the establishment of the People's Republic of Poland. They are grouped together even though they come from different backgrounds (a peasant woman, a landowner's daughter, a member of the bourgeoisie intelligentsia). However, what they had in common is the need to adjust to the new social and political conditions after WWII (social advancement or loss of their previously privileged position, respectively). All of them worked under a strict surveillance by the Security Service (*Służba Bezpieczeństwa*). Two of these women – H. Evert-Kappes and Z. Libiszowska – for the greater part of their academic lives pursued study in fields which were not readily appreciated by the authorities.

The social milieus from which they came could not differ more. Their varied baggage of life experience and research interest brought about a number of publications, the scope of their subjects equally varied. They conducted research in the fields of political, social and economic history. The subjects of their research were peasants, labourers, intelligentsia, landowners, aristocracy, rulers and politicians – practically no social group was left out of their research. They authored a number of academic articles, monographs and source compilations. They were also active in promoting historical knowledge through popular

science literature. An important part of their biographies is didactic activity – not only at the university level, but also by developing schoolbooks and participation in History Olympiads.

All of these women were very active members of scientific societies, particularly of the Polish Historical Society (*Polskie Towarzystwo Historyczne*), where they served at the highest positions of the Central Management and the Lodz Branch Management.

It is worth underlining that each of them was awarded several ministerial and rector's awards for their achievements in various fields of academic, social and political activities, as well as important state and ministerial decorations.

All of the above paints a picture of women full of passion and determination, who were able to take full advantage of the gift they received from their predecessors, enjoying academic fulfilment and achieving the highest academic honours.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Rzymowska'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'M' and a long, sweeping underline.