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Female Academics at the University of Latvia (1919–1940): A Brief Insight into the Key Issues

Sievietes pasniedzējas Latvijas Universitātē (1919–1940): īss ieskats problemātikā

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Atslēgvārdi:
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Summary The establishment of the University of Latvia encompassed the recruitment of highly trained teaching staff and the training of a new generation of academics that entailed the inclusion of woman as an equal. Although there were no legal restrictions for a woman to hold an academic position, the recruitment process was marked by a masculine orientation. Women's academic careers were hindered by practical circumstances: the low salary, the workload, family circumstances, as well as informal factors such as the negative attitude of male colleagues towards the presence of women in academia. This kind of attitude was a reflection of the resistance of Latvian society towards professionally active women. The issue of women's equality in academia was recognised as an existing problem, acknowledged also by the Latvian Association of Academically Educated Women which had been set up specifically to represent the interests of women who had received higher education. However, almost no practical action was taken to address the problem.

Kopsavilkums Latvijas Universitātes dibināšana ietvēra pragmatisku vajadzību pēc kvalificētiem pasniedzējiem, kā arī jaunu pasniedzēju sagatavošanu studiju procesā, paredzot arī sieviešu līdzdalību kā pilntiesīgām studentēm un kā pasniedzējām. Starpkaru periodā formāli nepastāvēja ierobežojumi sieviešu darbībai akadēmiskajos posteņos, tomēr mācībspēku rekrutēšanas politikā skaidri iezīmējās maskulīna orientācija. Sieviešu akadēmisko karjeru būtiski ietekmēja gan praktiski apstākļi – atalgojums, noslodze, ģimene, gan mācībspēku nostāja pret sievietēm akadēmiskajā vidē, kas variēja no neitrālas līdz klaji noraidošai, atspoguļojot sabiedrības pretestību sievietei kā profesionāli aktīvai personai. Sieviešu līdztiesības problēma akadēmiskajā vidē tika identificēta, tomēr starpkaru periodā institucionāli netika veikti nekādi praktiski pasākumi, lai problēmu novērstu. To nespēja risināt arī 1928. gadā dibinātā Latvijas akadēmiski izglītoto sieviešu apvienība, kuras viens no galvenajiem uzdevumiem bija izglītoto sieviešu profesionālo tiesību aizstāvēšana.

Introduction From the second half of the 19th century onwards, the proposition of giving women access to all levels of education, including higher education, became one of the main demands of the women's emancipation movement in Western Europe, North America and the Russian Empire.[1] Receiving education was considered one the basic elements for improving the social status and social mobility of women, as well as for gaining professional and financial independence. In 1888 Caroline Schultze (1866–?), a Polish medical student at the University of Paris, argued in her thesis about women doctors in the 19th century that women's aspiration for higher education was a part of "a general movement of intellectual and professional emancipation for women" (Clark 2008: 197). Gradually coming to believe that maternal qualities ideally suited women for the teaching profession, the development of secondary education for girls in the 19th century granted the possibility of taking up the position of governess and teacher. While access to higher education for women offered a chance to enter other professions, including the high-ranking positions of doctors, lawyers, engineers, architects and also university professors, these required knowledge acquired through academic preparation and were identified with a masculine world as represented by the male persona (Rennes 2011: 345; Clark 2008: 197).

The pace and character of women enrolling as students in higher educational institutions and also filling academic positions varied from country to country, depending on local socio-political conditions, as well as cultural and religious traditions. In the United States, for example, the first higher educational institutions – women's colleges – were established in the 1830s and women were recruited as lecturers and given a chance to pursue an academic career at the same institutions already as

1 The development of women's higher education varied widely according to particular countries and local social, political, economic, cultural and religious conditions and practices. Women's entry into universities first of all depended on girls' access to primary and secondary education. During the 19th century schooling expanded unprecedentedly for both sexes. Industrialisation determined a need for literate workers. In the process of urbanisation, cities provided new opportunities to open schools for varied society, outside elite and charity schools. The democratisation of European and North American societies advanced a rhetoric about the need to form educated citizens and the educated mothers and wives of future citizens. In Imperial Russia secondary schools for women opened after the 1858 educational reform. After 1858 women were allowed as external students at certain Russian universities. However, student unrest in the early 1860s caused the banning of women from Russian universities. A compromise – Higher Courses for Women – were sanctioned to open in the 1870s, although these women's "universities" were not allowed to award a degree (Rogers 2006: 93–133; Alpern Engel 2006: 306–343).

first-generation alumnae.[2] In the Russian Empire, on the other hand, women were not allowed to enrol at state universities. Starting from the 1870s, in Russian university centres – Saint Petersburg and Moscow – and in the largest peripheral cities such as Kazan, Kiev, Kharkiv, and Tomsk, organizations and private individuals established and funded an institutional alternative: higher education courses for women (in English translation usually rendered as Higher Courses for Women or Higher Women's Courses). As private organizations, these courses were deprived of the rights and privileges accorded to the single-sex (male) state higher educational institutions. For instance, graduates of these women's courses were denied the right to admission to the civil service and the Table of Ranks[3], the rights to teach at all levels and in all types of schools, as well as being denied the chance to pursue an academic degree and respectively also an academic career. The possibilities for women in the Russian Empire to be appointed to academic positions appeared only at the beginning of the 20th century, when the legal status of the women's courses and their certificates of graduation were recognized as equivalent to those offered by a university (Dudgeon 1982: 3–4).[4]

In the territory of present-day Latvia, women were enrolled as the first female students in the Baltic Technical School in Riga, founded by the German occupation authorities on 1 October, 1918[5], and in the School of Higher Education of Latvia,

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2 The first women's college, Wesleyan College, was founded in 1836 as a response to a need for educated citizens and the growing demand for more advanced education for women. Beside the objective to give women access to higher education, one of the main purposes of women's colleges as single sex educational institutions was the creation of a controlled environment for female students in order not to compromise their femininity and maintain their respectability that could be endangered by interacting with male students (Langdon 2001: 7; Schwartz 1997: 507)

3 The Table of Ranks was a formal list of positions and ranks in the military, government, and court of Imperial Russia. Admission to the civil service and Table of Ranks provided different social guarantees, for instance, pensions, medical care, housing, etc.

4 The Russian State Council in 1910 recognized the Saint Petersburg courses, known as the Bestuzhev courses, as the first courses equivalent to a university. The graduates of other women's higher education courses gained the right to take examinations at state universities by law as of 19 December, 1911. From 1904, women were allowed to be hired as demonstrators and trainees at the Saint Petersburg Medical Institute for Women, and from 1906 in the position of assistant.

5 During the World War I, Germany in the summer of 1915 occupied the western part of Latvia – Courland, the rest of the Latvian territory remained part of the Russian Empire. After a separate peace treaty between Germany and Soviet Russia (Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed on 3 March, 1918), German troops occupied the entire territory of Latvia.

founded by the Soviet authorities on 8 February, 1919[6]. However, the work of these institutions was short-lived and study programmes were limited. Women obtained full gender equality – equal rights, possibilities and responsibilities – in higher education after the proclamation of the independent Latvian state on 18 November, 1918.[7] Putting into place a broadly accessible and comprehensive system of higher education was one of the most important domestic issues and a quintessential factor to advance the economic and cultural development of the new state and to promote democracy as well, engaging both men and women as equal citizens, and to ensure the creation of a nationally minded Latvian society. There were several higher educational institutions in interwar Latvia. On 20 August, 1919, the government of Latvia founded the Art Academy of Latvia and the Conservatory of Music of Latvia – two specific institutions of higher education to provide a focused education in the arts, but in 1939 the Jelgava Academy of Agriculture was established. However, the epitome of higher education and science, and the largest comprehensive higher educational institution, became the University of Latvia, founded on 28 September, 1919.[8] The establishment of this new university implied two aspects in the matter of teaching staff: a pragmatic need of qualified lecturers to ensure the study process and the preparation of a new cohort of Latvian academics (as well as other professionals), entailing women's participation as students and academic lecturers. The aim of this article is to characterise female academics as a new phenomenon in the interwar Latvian academic environment, analysing certain aspects of this issue – the recruitment of female academics, the attitude of male colleagues and the struggle for equality.

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6 As a result of the invasion of the Red Army, in January 1919 Soviet Latvia was declared, formally an independent entity, but actually a part of Soviet Russia. Soviet Latvia was officially liquidated after the liberation of the eastern part of Latvia – Latgale on January 1920 by the armed forces of the independent Latvian state (proclaimed in 1918), although Soviet Latvia's controlled territory had already shrunk significantly after the loss of Riga at the end of May 1919.

7 As a result of invasion of Red Army and the formation of Soviet Latvia, the first government of independent Latvia – the Latvian Provisional Government – was forced to leave the capital Riga in January 1919. The Provisional Government returned to Riga on 8 July, 1919. On their return to Riga, the Provisional Government continued to strengthen the internal and external defence of the new state (for instance, by creating a unified Latvian army), as well as establishing a number of national and educational institutions.

8 The Minister of Education, Kārlis Kasparsons (1865–1962), in July 1919 made an official decision to establish the University of Latvia. During that summer the Organization Commission of the University carried out a takeover of the assets of Riga Polytechnical Institute, developed and approved the structure of the new university, recruited teaching staff, drew up rules of student admission and approved Latvian language as the language of tuition.

Up until today, Latvian historians and other researchers have studied women's presence in higher education as academic personnel and research staff only fragmentarily and from one viewpoint. One of the most important publications on this subject is the monograph by Swedish historian Per Bolin on the creation of the University of Latvia from a national perspective. Besides discussion about the university's ethnic policy and relationships, Bolin has also researched the university's recruitment policy from the perspective of gender, revealing an orientation towards masculinity in the structure of the university. Discussing the characteristics of the university's recruitment policy, Bolin concludes that the gender issue in this policy was more than obvious, suggesting that the Latvian nation did not need educated women (Bolin 2012: 62). Several publications have been dedicated to some of the most notable Latvian female scientists and academics. However, these articles are not in-depth studies, but a summarization of the biographical data and an overview of the more noticeable professional and public activities of these women (Ķestere, Marihina 2012; Ozoliņa 2010; Ķestere, Marihina, Mareskoti 2015; Grosvalds, Griņevičs 2011; Grosvalds, Griņevičs 2014; Grosvalds 2017; Grosvalds 2019). The historian of medicine, Arnis Vīksna, has examined the biographies of the first Latvian female medical scientists, and has outlined their prospects of an academic career at the University of Latvia as well (Dālmane, Vīksna 2006; Vīksna 2012). Researcher Valda Ozoliņa in her study has aggregated information about the number of female academics and the positions they held at the university in 1939, although here also the focal point of her article is a summary of the basic biographical data: date of birth and death, birth place, previous education, and area of scientific interest (Ozoliņa 2001). Moreover, most of these articles are not based on a study of extensive sources, but on reference literature. Consequently in Latvian historiography there are no broader and more complex evaluations of women's representation in academia, in addition to such themes as the process of feminisation of the university's recruitment policy or the feminisation of various professions, and the gender imbalance at higher educational institutions.

This paper is based on combined methodological approaches: research of archival sources, literature studies, comparison of female academic biographies, data analysis and synthesis.

Female Representation in the University of Latvia

In the early years of the University of Latvia there was a self-evident necessity to define the academic ranks and positions within the university. Definition of the staff was included in the Constitution of the

University of Latvia that was approved by the Saeima in 1923[9], and established that the university had teaching staff: professors, associate professors (docents), privatdocents,[10] lecturers and assistants – and scientific-pedagogical auxiliary staff: librarians and their assistants, preparators (laboratory technicians), laboratory assistants, instructors and sub-assistants – senior students who acted as aides to the assistants (Latvijas Universitātes satversme 1923: 50–51). A person holding a doctor's degree could be elected to a professor's position, while the position of associate professor or docent and privatdocent required a first academic degree and completion of the habilitation process, fulfilling certain criteria set by the university and its faculties. The Faculty of Medicine, however, determined that only those with a doctor's degree could hold the position of privatdocent (Baltiņš 2003: 68–71). Persons who had completed higher education could be elected as lecturers and assistants, while the university's senior students could be elected as scientific-pedagogical auxiliary staff.

Besides defining academic ranks and positions, the university's early years were characterized by a lack of highly trained Latvian and Latvian-speaking academics. The university's organisation committee and faculties tried to solve this problem by recruiting non-Latvian academics from other countries or recruiting the younger generation of Latvian academics who had received their basic training at the universities of the Russian Empire (Bolin 2012: 197).[11] Amongst the younger generation of Latvian academics the first generation of Latvian educated women can definitely also be included, women who had received their education in Russian higher courses for women and European universities before 1918. Respectively, women were recruited as academic personnel and research staff shortly after the founding of the university. This process can be viewed as a part of the so-called "feminisation of universities' recruitment policies" that from the turn of the 20th century entailed a greater representation of women in academia (Cabanel 2018: 90). However, such a recruitment

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9 When the university was founded, it was known as the School of Higher Education of Latvia. After the approval of the university constitution project on 22 August, 1922, it was renamed University of Latvia (LU)

10 *Translator's note:* Since academic ranks are country-specific, there is no direct equivalent in English for 'docent': the nearest approximation might be 'associate professor'. A privatdocent was a docent without tenure.

11 Bolin categorizes Latvian academics into four generation groups: *older* – academics educated at Dorpat (present-day Tartu), St. Petersburg and Moscow universities, *middle* – those who were fully established within the Russian Empire universities before World War I, *younger* – those who had received their education at Russian universities, but developed their careers at the University of Latvia, *youngest* – those who received their education and made their career at University of Latvia (Bolin 2012: 183–184).

policy certainly was not a deliberate objective of the University of Latvia (or other universities at that time). Furthermore, the entry and presence of women in academia was characterized by several features: they were few in number, achieved limited positions, and pursued a narrow area of scholarly interests.

The number of women recruited in the university's early years was very small in comparison to male academics. At the same time, sources indicate that an invitation to work at the new higher educational institution came from the university itself. This is confirmed in the minutes of faculty meetings, when proposals were made to invite specific persons to work at the university, as well as by other sources. For example, linguist Alīse Karlsone's (1881–1959) personal file as the university's employee includes a confirmation by the rector of the university, Ernests Felsbergs (1866–1928), that Latvia needs Karlsone as a researcher, and an appeal to the University of Kyiv not to delay her return to Latvia (Karlsone at that time was a lecturer at said university) (E. Felsberga apliecinājums 3. februārī). Karlsone's example shows that during the period of Imperial Russian universities the names and professional achievements of educated women were well enough known in the academic milieu of Latvian intellectuals and professionals, also through personal acquaintance (Latvian male teaching staff – Latvian female students), to be considered as candidates for the university's teaching positions.

Although women were being recruited as teaching staff already during the process of the university's organization, for instance, the linguist Anna Ābele (1881–1975) was invited to the university on 18 August, 1919 (Latvijas Universitāte 1925: 291), the highest post to which women were elected in the university's early years was the position of lecturer, which required the applicant to hold a master's degree (at that time known as 'candidate degree') and was a junior academic position. The previously mentioned Alīse Karlsone was elected as a lecturer in the German language at the Faculty of Philology and Philosophy in 1922, along with several other women (Filoloģijas un filozofijas fakultātes sēdes protokols 7. oktobrī).[12] Significantly, the education of these women clearly presented women's inclination to major in the humanities – an area that for a long period of time was stereotypically characterized as the most appropriate specialization for women. For instance, the well-known educator Anna Rūmane-Ķeniņa (1877–1950), who had studied at the University of Paris and the Jean-Jacques Rousseau Institute in Geneve, was elected as a lecturer in modern pedagogy. Educator Ella Rītiņa (1879–1960), who had trained at the Moscow Higher

12 Significantly, Karlsone (as the first woman) was originally offered the position of privatdocent. However, her sample lectures, a mandatory requirement for a candidate for the position of privatdocent, were evaluated negatively by the faculty's council (LU Filoloģijas un filozofijas fakultātes sēdes protokols 8.09.1922.).

Fig. 1. Professor Walter Frost and assistant of the Faculty of Philology and Philosophy Milda Liepiņa (standing in the middle) conduct class of experimental psychology. Photographer Krišs Rake, Riga, 1920–1930s. The University of Latvia Academic Library, LABR R7724-09.

Education Courses for Women, was elected as a lecturer in the methodology of the natural sciences. Graduate of English studies at the University of Zurich, Eiženija Turkina (1881–1967), was elected as an English lecturer (Latvijas Universitāte 1925: 291–292). An Italian, Clara Coïsson-Gersoni (1896–1981), was one of the few non-Latvian female academic staff and Head of the Italian Language Institute, and was elected as an Italian language lecturer on the recommendation of the Italian Ambassador to Latvia (Itālijas vēstnieka Latvijā rekomendācija 11. aprīlī). Teacher and writer Elza Stērste (1885–1976), who had studied art history at Sorbonne University, was invited to be lecturer in French, however Stērste declined the offer (LU Filoloģijas un filozofijas fakultātes sēdes protokols 27. maijā; LU Filoloģijas un filozofijas fakultātes sēdes protokols 16. maijā).

Besides the Faculty of Philology and Philosophy, there were only three faculties that recruited first-generation female graduates. The specificity of these other faculties determined a need for assistants whose main task was to organize practical laboratory work, unlike lecturers whose task was to teach one certain subject. The Faculty of Chemistry recruited at junior assistant positions Irma Kvelberga (1887–?) and Katrīna Zēberga (1889–1975), both of them had trained in the natural sciences at the Russian Higher Courses for Women, while the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences recruited biologist Marija Tīlmane (1889–1975) and physicist Tajisa Putniņa (1891–1962), who had previously worked at Vladivostok Observatory and were sent to the University of Latvia after the request of the Ministry of Education of Latvia in February 1920 (Jansons 2008: 39). Significantly, the example of Putniņa, as well as Karlsone and Ābele, reflects the University Organization Committee and Ministry of Education practice for the recruitment of teaching staff: that of officially inviting Latvian academics working in Russian universities to come to Latvia. However, the previously mentioned women were only the few Latvian female academics who held any position at a Russian university. Several women were recruited also by

the Faculty of Medicine. For instance, Late Veibele (1877–1949), widely known as the first Latvian female dentist, was elected as assistant at the university's Dental Institute. It should be noted that the profession of doctor, similar to the job of teacher and in other areas of humanities, was viewed as a suitable occupation for women because of the similarity of the perceived natural qualities of a mother (caring, nursing) to those required by a doctor. Although feminisation of the doctor's profession took place more slowly than the profession of teacher, there was a widespread belief that women chose those professions that were connected with the human being, a belief that had not changed since the 19th century. The Latvian psychiatrist Hermanis Buduls (1882–1954), on the basis of his observations at the university, claimed that "women mainly studied subjects related to living people – human healing and teaching; women are not interested in purely theoretical sciences" (J. St. 1925: 3). The same observations were applied to women in academia and science.

Alongside the first generation of educated women, the university also recruited the youngest generation of Latvian academics – those women who had enrolled and graduated from the University of Latvia. Amongst the youngest generation of Latvian female academics, those women who were educated at European universities during the interwar period definitely can be included also. However, none of them were recruited by the University of Latvia. One of the main reasons could be that it was widely believed that a doctor's degree was relatively easy to obtain from Western European universities, thus such a degree seemingly held less value. One of the few women who applied for a position at the University of Latvia was Milda Palēviča (1889–1972), who had received a PhD in philosophy from the University of Paris in 1925. However, Ernests Felsbergs during a Faculty of Philology and Philosophy board meeting noted that Palēviča's doctor's degree was not the highest degree, even in the context of the French higher education system, moreover, such an education did not provide the level of knowledge necessary for a lecturer at the Faculty of Philology and Philosophy (Baltiņš 2004: 11; LU Filoloģijas un filozofijas fakultātes sēdes protokols 20. martā). Most of the youngest generation female academics were elected to the position of sub-assistant in the more advanced years of their studies. By recruiting the most capable and talented senior students, the position of sub-assistant was seen as the first step of a potential academic and research career, since most of the sub-assistants after graduating were elected to be junior assistants. In 1929, for example, from 18 women who were elected to teaching staff positions and had graduated the University of Latvia, 17 had been elected as sub-assistants while still studying. However, when investigating female involvement in academic and scholarly work at the university, it must be taken in account that in some cases the position of sub-assistant was a short-term (one month) position to carry out a specific task,

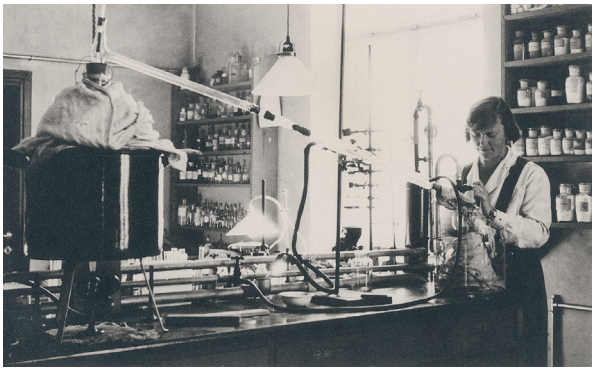

Fig. 2. Olga Grauze, assistant at the Faculty of Chemistry. Photo by unknown author, Riga 1930s. Pauls Stradiņš Medicine History Museum, F 31963.

and basically was not related to scientific-pedagogical work. For instance, Anna Leppika (married Rūtiņa, 1903–1987), a student in the Faculty of Agriculture, was elected as a sub-assistant with the main task of organising the faculty's library: she was to compile and register the library's catalogue (Paziņojums LU Saimniecības padomei 1. oktobrī), without the option of being elected as a junior assistant.

Although being appointed to the position of sub-assistant or assistant formally depended on the abilities of the candidate, recruitment policy and statistical data shows that junior academic positions were reserved for young Latvian male students and graduates (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4), while talented female students alongside talented students of non-Latvian origin were given considerably fewer opportunities to pursue academic careers (Bolin 2012: 62, 139).

Faculty	Privat-docent	Lecturer	Senior Assis-tant	Assis-tant	Junior Assis-tant
Agriculture			1	1	
Chemistry			2	3	
Engineering					1
Mathematics and Natural Sciences	1			1	1
Medicine				6	4
Philology and Philosophy	2	2		1	1
Veterinary Medicine				1	
Total	**3**	**2**	**3**	**13**	**7**

Fig. 3. Women among teaching staff, 1928/1929 (Latvijas Universitāte 1929).

Of course, it should be noted that each faculty had a certain number of academic and pedagogical positions and this depended largely on the size, scholarly activities and financial capabilities of that particular faculty. Besides, the assigning of assistant positions was significantly determined by the composition of students according to gender. For instance, at the Faculty of Mechanics there were no women in any teaching or scientific-pedagogical auxiliary staff position, at the same time it is impossible to speak about resistance to the promotion of the academic careers of female graduates because there simply were no female candidates. Materials from student personal files show that up until 1940 only 13 women had studied in the Faculty of Mechanics and only two had graduated with a degree in engineering technology – Marija Dreimane (1912–?) (Marijas Dreimanes matrikula) and Jūlija Kaplane (1899–?) (Jūlijas Kaplanes matrikula).

Faculty	Senior Docent	Docent	Privat-docent	Lec-turer	Senior Assis-tant	Assis-tant	Junior Assis-tant
Agriculture	10	7	5	3	6	2	2
Architecture	8				8	1	
Chemistry	7		3			4	1
Engineering	13		3		3		
Law and Economics	13		6	2		2	
Mathematics and Natural Sciences	3	2	5		2	2	3
Mechanics	8	4	1		5	3	
Medicine	3		14		1	16	8
Philology and Philosophy	6	2	7	6			
Theology	2	1	1				
Veterinary Medicine	2				2	2	1
Total	**75**	**16**	**45**	**11**	**27**	**32**	**15**

Fig. 4. Men among teaching staff, 1928/1929 (Latvijas Universitāte 1929).[13]

13 Considering that no women held the position of professor until 1940, the table does not provide data on the number of male professors.

Fig. 5. Privatdocent and senior assistant at the Faculty of Medicine Lūcija Jēruma-Krastiņa. Photo by unknown author, Riga 1930s. Pauls Stradiņš Medicine History Museum, MVM 58031 Falb 182/7.

The highest number of academic positions filled by women were at the Faculty of Medicine. For example, in the academic year 1928/1929 there were six female assistants (Fig. 3), but in 1938/1939 – eight (Fig. 6). Nevertheless, such a number did not imply more activity or more talent on the part of female students, or even that professors in the Faculty of Medicine were more open-minded to female academics. Perhaps the relatively high number of female assistants in the Faculty of Medicine partially reflected the proportionally large number of female students in the faculty, despite that, as the physician and former student Kārlis Arājs (1915–2005) remembers, there was an unwritten rule that women were never allowed to constitute the majority of medical students, even if women made up the majority of applicants (Arājs 2005: 28). In general, the number of male assistants in the Faculty of Medicine was still higher: for example, up until 1939, of all senior assistants, assistants and junior assistants who had been elected to these positions, 59% were men (Latvijas Universitāte 1939b: 621–623). The relatively large number of assistants was required due to the specifics of clinical disciplines in the faculty. It is significant that the majority of assistants gave up the position after a short period of time, not being able come to terms with intensive academic work and numerous duties, combined with the necessity of additional part-time employment because of the low salary. Of course, this problem affected both men and women, in addition women often gave up their position for family reasons – marriage and pregnancy. The frequent turnover of assistants at the Faculty of Medicine was also determined by the Faculty Council's decision of 7 April, 1930, that assistants may hold a position for longer than six years only if they have passed their doctoral examinations, but no longer than ten years if the doctoral thesis has not been defended (Baltiņš 2004: 19). As the result of such a rule,

Austra Bebre (1892–1965), who had been elected as assistant at the Institute of Histology, had to leave her position. Bebre was seen as one of the most outstanding and capable candidates to establish an academic and scholarly career in histology, a field that needed development in Latvia, and her doctoral thesis was rated as being of a high quality. Nonetheless, her doctoral thesis was not accepted, neither in 1932 nor in 1933. It is not entirely clear as to what were the reasons why Bebre's dissertation was rejected, researchers draw attention to the subjectivity of one of the reviewers (Vīksne, Dālmane 2006: 169)[14], but historian Lilita Zemīte advances an idea that perhaps it was a random coincidence of facts, though perhaps it still may have been a confirmation of the existence of prejudice towards women in the academic environment (Zemīte 2004: 130–131).

Faculty	Senior Docent	Privatdocent	Lecturer	Senior Assistant	Assistant	Junior Assistant
Agriculture		3	1	1	2	
Chemistry		2		3		1
Engineering						2
Law and Economics						1
Mathematics and Natural Sciences	1	1		2	1	1
Medicine		1		1	8	9
Philology and Philosophy	1	2	2	2		
Veterinary Medicine		1				
Total	**2**	**10**	**3**	**8**	**11**	**14**

Fig. 6. Women in teaching staff positions, 1938/1939.

There were no female professors at the University of Latvia during the interwar period. One of the main criteria for being awarded the position of professor was, of

14 The subjectivity of one of the reviewers is also mentioned by Anna Bormane (1896–1990), who defended her dissertation in medicine in 1934. Bormane personally thought that the critique of her thesis was unduly harsh and unfair. Experiencing disappointment at receiving such harsh criticism, she left her position as assistant and returned to revising her thesis only after encouragement by the professor, Pauls Stradiņš (1896–1958) (Stradiņš 1985: 6). Significantly, Bormane never highlights her gender as a factor in the process of developing and defending her doctoral thesis.

Fig. 7. Anna Bormane, first woman to be awarded a doctoral degree at the University of Latvia. Photo by unknown author, Riga, 1930s. Pauls Stradiņš Medicine History Museum, F 30908/1.

course, a doctor's degree. There were only five women who earned their doctor's degree at the University of Latvia, as opposed to 137 male doctoral degree recipients (Baltiņš 2004). In 1934 a doctor's degree in medicine was awarded to Anna Bormane (1896–1990), in 1935 – by Lūcija Jēruma-Krastiņa (1899–1968), in 1936 – Marta Vīgante (1900–1966), in 1938 a doctoral degree in philology was received Zenta Mauriņa (1897–1978), but in 1939 a doctorate in agriculture was received by Dagmāra Talce-Niedra (1892–1960). However, a PhD did not guarantee the successful and rapid growth of an academic career. During interwar years, senior docent was the highest academic position achieved by any woman. In 1939 only two women (against 69 male senior docents) were elected to this position – Anna Ābele in Slavic philology and Marija Tīlmane in the field of plant physiology. Ten women were elected to the position of privatdocent (versus 161 male privatdocents) (Latvijas Universitāte 1939b: 7–633).

Between or Against Male Colleagues It is impossible to argue with complete certainty if the low number of female recipients of doctor's degrees was due to the lack of ability, ambition or mentorship. It is possible to argue that the low number of female holders of doctoral degrees and academics overall was affected by financial matters. As a doctor's degree did not guarantee an academic career, the

jobs of assistant teaching staff and teaching staff were not financially viable, moreover writing a doctoral thesis was a time-consuming process, and many women (as well as men) sought more stable, better paid work outside academia, working in secondary education, the civil service, hospitals etc. However, it is also possible to speak about the impact of gendered power dynamics between male academics and female academics. There are a couple of records that demonstrate the attitude of male academic personnel towards their female colleagues and also students, reflecting how male academics exercised power. The attitude of male academics ranged from neutral, objective and equal treatment to an almost contemptuous attitude and strong resistance towards the presence of women in the academic world, both as students and as academics. One peculiarity was the Faculty of Philology and Philosophy, where the proportion of female students during the 1920s and 1930s was around 80 per cent – the highest number of female students among all the faculties (Latvijas Universitāte 1939a: 231).[15] Besides, the Faculty of Philology and Philosophy was one of the first at the university to include women academics, and the high number of female graduates presented potential candidates for teaching staff positions at the faculty.

One of the most prominent academics to express a very negative attitude towards women was the linguist Pēteris Šmits (1869–1938). For instance, during a faculty meeting in the early 1920s he more than once stated that he was strongly against women being on the teaching staff (LU Filoloģijas un filozofijas fakultātes sēdes protokols 24. martā). He argued that it would erode scholarly standards. "In general, the excessive number of female students in our faculty is not a particularly encouraging phenomenon; over time, women could also become teaching staff, and this would lead to the decline of scholarly activities" (LU Filoloģijas un filozofijas fakultātes sēdes protokols 1. decembrī). Šmits' standpoint, and even the rhetoric used, was nothing unique: it was similar to the arguments used by academics who were against female higher education and professionalisation in the 19th century. For instance, a similar statement to Šmits' was expressed in 1870, when the board of the Riga Polytechnic discussed the possibility of admitting women as external students. The decision not to admit women was justified because "women could make academic life uncomfortable or even worse" (Grosvalds, Griņevičs 2014: 53).

Šmits' negative assessment of the scholarly work of Anna Bērzkalne (1891–1956) was one of the main reasons why she did not receive support for her academic development in Latvia (LU Filoloģijas un filozofijas fakultātes sēdes protokols 31. augustā).

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15 Due to the high number of female students, the Faculty of Philology and Philosophy was commonly known as 'the women's rose garden', while the premises where the faculty's auditoriums were located were called 'the corridor of roses' (Rūķe-Draviņa 1994: 174; Miezone 1999: 139).

In the 1920s and early 1930s Bērzkalne was one of the leading figures in developing folkloric studies as an academic discipline in Latvia, and the first director of the Archives of Latvian Folklore (1924–1929). She was also the only one amongst the generation of younger graduates who was working towards a doctoral examination in ethnology (Bolin 2012: 218). After analysing Bērzkalne's correspondence, researcher Rita Grīnvalde concludes that Bērzkalne considered scholarly work to be her calling and the dismissive attitude from the university affected her scholarship morally and practically (Treija 2018: 131). According to Grīnvalde, Bērzkalne herself believed that she was discriminated against in the academic milieu clearly because of her gender (Treija 2013: 16). Pedagogue and psychologist Milda Liepiņa (1889–1972) expressed a similar opinion. Liepiņa, who was a senior assistant at the University of Latvia, was not elected as privatdocent due to a negative evaluation of her sample lecture – one of the requirements for becoming a privatdocent – and in 1939 was forced to quit her position. Liepiņa herself believed that male academics did not want to see women as lecturers (Zigmunde 2006: 162). However, as a rule researchers need to be careful when assessing to what extent the academic and scholarly success of women, including Bērzkalne's, was influenced by their gender and male academic views about the place and role of women in the academic environment. For instance, Šmits along with professors Jānis Endzelīns (1873–1961), Ernests Blese (1892–1964) and Juris Plāķis (1869–1942) were the ones who urged to promote privatdocent Anna Ābele to docent, based on her long-term scrupulously thorough academic and scholarly work (Jāņa Endzelīna, Jura Plāķa, Ernesta Bleses, Pētera Šmita iesniegums 25. maijā). Perhaps Šmits was generally against the presence of women in the academic environment, but was able to objectively assess the scholarly contribution of individual persons, regardless of their gender.[16] Beside Pēteris Šmits, a clearly resentful attitude towards female academics was manifested by assistant professor of pedagogy Eduards Pētersons (1882–1958), who did not shy away from stating openly in his lectures that the main task of a woman was to marry, give birth to children and to raise them, giving up any idea of studying and building a career (Rūķe-Draviņa 1999: 190).

The negative attitude towards female academics from their male colleagues reflects society's resistance to the process of women entering the public sphere which was mostly traditional in character. As in most of Europe, Latvian interwar society saw woman as a mother and devoted wife (Lipša 2014: 186). Professionally active women, as well as female academics, did not conform with this perceived role. Educated and professionally active women were accused of being selfish by

16 Perhaps Šmits' position in favour of electing Ābele as a docent was influenced by his friende ship with Endzelīns, who in turn was close friends with Ābele and valued her highly as a scholar.

fulfilling their own professional ambitions, usually at the expense of their family life and even their femininity, because the professional realm was identified with masculinity (Melnalkšņa 1924: 4). Although the concept of femininity was interpreted relatively broadly, it was primarily associated with a woman's desire to become pregnant and to become a mother and wife. The professional field, in particular science and academia, was associated with hard work and long working hours that inevitably influenced the health of women, that is, their ability to carry a child (Ausējs 1937: 3).

The writer Zenta Mauriņa (1897–1978), who was the first female to be awarded a doctorate in philology at the university, also speaks about the resentful attitude towards educated women within the Faculty of Philology and Philosophy. In her autobiographical novel, Mauriņa claims that one of the main reasons why defending her doctoral thesis was such a prolonged and complicated process was due to fact that she was a woman. Mauriņa mentions certain moments in the process of evolution of her doctoral thesis that humiliated her as a woman and a researcher. "[..] I was the first one who wanted to receive a doctorate at the Faculty of Philology – Philosophy. Besides, I was a female. If, in general, this fact is considered a big disadvantage, then it became a powerful obstacle to defending a thesis. It was not proper for a woman to receive a doctorate if a male creature had not yet done so" (Mauriņa 1997: 431).[17] Mauriņa admits that her goal really was an academic career at the university. "By law, a doctorate opened the route to the position of docent; and the position of docent, on the other hand, was the path to academic young people, and this they wanted to block off to me by all possible means". (Mauriņa 1997: 453). Mauriņa's statements are partially confirmed by one of the official opponents to her thesis, professor Ludvigs Bērziņš (1870–1965). He remembers that academics of the faculty in private conversations stated that there was no chance of Mauriņa receiving a position within the faculty (Bērziņš 1977: 35). However, Jānis Stradiņš (1933–2019) has pointed out that Mauriņa's statements seem to be exaggerated. The reasons for such an outburst could be Mauriņa's extraordinary personality, mental strain and the controversy surrounding her dissertation (Stradiņš 1997). Although there were prejudices in academic circles against the promotion of women to the highest academic positions, the arguments against Mauriņa's dissertation were based more on her close connection with Germany and German culture as well as her existential philosophical thought

17 In reality Mauriņa was not the first who wished to receive a doctorate at the Faculty of Philology: before her, a doctor's degree in philology or in philosophy had already been defended by eight men.

that clearly ran against Latvian nationalism.[18] The fact that gender was probably not the main factor that determined the successful development and defence of a doctoral thesis, as well as an academic career, to some extent is confirmed by the experiences of the *right* gender (male) academics.

The linguist and folklorist Velta Rūķe-Draviņa (1917–2003), who was a student at the Department of Baltic Philology at the Faculty of Philology and Philosophy from 1934 till 1939, recollects that it was not regarded as something peculiar at the time that despite the large number of female students and graduates, men were in the majority at the highest academic positions at the faculty and at the university in general (Rūķe-Draviņa 1994: 174). At the same time, she accents that in the attitude of the faculty's male academics towards colleagues there was no distinction between male and female students and staff (Rūķe-Draviņa 1994: 174). However, her observations were based solely on her personal experience. As examples of a neutral attitude, she mentions professors Ernests Blese, Juris Plāķis, who was known as a strong opponent of the women's movement and also head of the Department of Baltic Philology, and Jānis Endzelīns, who promoted the careers of several female linguists (Rūķe-Draviņa 1994: 176–177). Per Bolin, at same time, even considers that among the most prominent professors at the university, Endzelīns appears to have been the most open to the advancement not only of non-Latvians, but also women academics, defining as a priority knowledge and experience, not gender and nationality. Endzelīns clearly supported the academic careers of linguists Anna Ābele and Edīte Hauzenberga-Šturma (1901–1983), and also the lecturer in German, Alīse Karlsone (Bolin 2012: 218). However, we should not simplify Bolin's conclusion by considering that these three examples indicate Endzelīns' more favourable attitude towards female students and academics. These examples demonstrate rather the objectivity of Endzelīns, who expressed criticism or praise wherever necessary. For example, Endzelīns was very critical about Karlsone's scholarly activities and objected against her election as privatdocent during her studies at the University of Munich and after receiving her doctor's degree in 1926. Endzelīns objected that Karlsone had turned more attention to comparative studies, rather than to German philology, the

18 The negative attitude towards German culture and Germany was based on the complicated relationships between ethnic Latvians and the Baltic Germans who previously were the ruling class in the Baltic provinces (the region of modern-day Latvia and Estonia) of the Russian Empire, and were reduced to the status of minority in interwar independent Latvia. The attitude towards the Baltic German minority, as well as German culture, was significantly aggravated by the policy of the authoritarian regime of Kārlis Ulmanis. One of the ideological foundations of the Ulmanis' regime was the principle of nationalism and the primacy of ethnic Latvians, envisaging the Latvianization of economic and cultural life.

field in which she was elected as lecturer and was supposed to be specializing in and focussing on at the university (Jāņa Endzelīna atsauksme, 20. janvārī).

Struggle for equal academic opportunities and positions?

All in all, the presence of women in academia during the interwar period remained marginal and the progress of academic positions being filled by women was modest, at least when compared to the feminisation of studies. Consequently it raises the question of whether women's equality in academia was identified as a topical problem in interwar Latvia and whether this problem was actively addressed, and if so – how.

The Latvian Association of Academically Educated Women (LAAEW), which was established in 1928 to promote the scientific activities of university women and to protect their professional rights, identified that there were professional areas that women were unable to break into, despite having equality "on paper" and an absence of formal laws forbidding women to pursue certain positions in the workplace. Some of these positions were: diplomat, ordained pastor, and also professor at higher educational institutions (Brante 1931: 164).[19] Although such an evaluation was based more on statistical data regarding the positions reached by women at the university, and not on concrete legal examples of the restriction of women's rights to these positions (as such restrictions did not exist).

Women's professorships were non-existent or rare also in other countries[20] and this was even recognized as a problem by the International Federation of University Women (IFUW), which was the first international organization uniting university women globally and at international level, bringing up discussions about university women's professional equality, as well as inclusion and career opportunities in the sciences (Rozīte 2021: 62).[21] As the number of educated women increased, IFUW considered it was necessary to ascertain what higher education had given to women in certain professional areas. The IFUW Committee for Intellectual Cooperation,

19 Women were banned from being ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia. This ban aroused discussions among Latvian society because the Faculty of Theology, which prepared pastors, enrolled women. Women graduates of this faculty worked mostly as school teachers.

20 For instance, in 1938/1939 there were only five female professors in all of Poland's universities (Popiński 2019: 125).

21 The Latvian Association of Academically Educated Women was admitted to the IFUW on 9 August, 1929.

whose main activities were the endowment of fellowships for travel and research in the arts and sciences, promoting the exchange of female researchers, academic personnel and teachers, and the granting of travel cards for intellectual workers to give access to libraries, museums, archives and institutions of a scientific, literary or pedagogical nature (Goodman 2012: 366), created questionnaires directed to national federations of university women. These included questions about the impact of higher education on women's search for employment, whether women were working in an area related to their education, whether the occupation provided sufficient financial, family status and how it impacted women's professional career, as well as whether women had experienced discrimination due to their gender and whether they received the same salary as men, etc. (Lūgums visām akadēmiski izglītotām sievietēm Latvijā). Unfortunately, due to the passivity of its members, the LAAEW failed to obtain comprehensive data, and the number of completed questionnaires was not sufficient for IFUW to draw general conclusions about the status of educated women in Latvia.

IFUW also regularly collected separate data about the number of female students in universities, their specialization, as well as information from women in academic positions and their experience in the workplace (IFUW questionnaire). Reports of these data and practical problems faced by university women were discussed at IFUW conferences and linked into different committees of the League of Nations, as this was viewed as one of the most important channels to make an impact on women's legal and professional positions at international level (Goodman 2011: 703–704). The Latvian association managed to collect more than a few answers to questionnaires, for instance Dagmāra Talce-Niedra, agronomist and senior assistant at the University of Latvia in the early 1930s, answered that the education she acquired and employment at the university provides for her financially, however it requires great devotion and can be balanced with family life only because she does not have children (Dagmāras Talces-Niedras atbilde) Yet generally the LAAEW also failed to obtain sufficient data to submit the survey about women in academia and their status in the academic environment to the IFUW. Besides identifying the problem, neither the LAAEW nor any other organisations took any other practical measures to advance women's equality in academia, despite that most of the female academics were members of the LAAEW. To a certain extent this was due to the fact that there were no legal restrictions for a woman to hold an academic position at a university. Moreover, any possible struggle for equal academic opportunities and positions was determined by the traditional opinion prevailing among the public that an academic person is male.

Conclusions

During the interwar years, female academics emerged as a specific new phenomenon of the academic environment. The establishment of the University of Latvia, which was one of the important domestic issues and embodied the creation of a comprehensive higher education system, encompassed two aspects: the recruitment of highly trained teaching staff and the training of a new generation of academics. The process entailed the inclusion of women as equals within the university's teaching staff and represented a wider process in Europe and North America – the feminisation of universities' recruitment policies.

Female academics were represented by two generations of academically educated women: those who were trained at Russian and European universities before 1918, and those who were educated at the University of Latvia. However, none of the female academics managed to achieve a professorship, a widespread problem even in the whole of Europe. Women's academic careers were hindered by practical circumstances: the low salary of junior teaching staff, the workload, family circumstances (marriage, childbirth etc.), availability of vacant academic positions, as well as informal factors such as the negative attitude of male colleagues towards the presence of women in academia, and their scholarly and academic advancement. This kind of attitude was a reflection of the resistance of Latvian society overall towards professionally active women, who were confronted with the idealized and accepted woman's role as mother and wife. The issue of women's equality in higher education institutions as a professional environment was recognised as an existing problem, acknowledged also by the Latvian Association of Academically Educated Women which had been set up specifically to represent the interests of women who had received higher education. However, almost no practical action was taken to address the problem.

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