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In the Shadow of Noble Conservatives:
 Agrarian Women Movement in Eastern Provinces
 of Prussia in 1912–1914.
 The Case of the Province of Pomerania

*W cieniu szlacheckich konserwatystów.
 Agrarny ruch kobiety we wschodnich prowincjach Prus w latach 1912–1914.
 Przypadek prowincji Pomorze*

ABSTRACT

The article describes the circumstances in which a part of the nobility from the Prussian Province of Pomerania agreed to support Agricultural Housewives' Associations. That new type of women's organisations propagated a moderate version of emancipation of women in rural areas and was initiated in East Prussia in the 1890s by Elisabet

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Boehm. The organisations were first established in Pomerania in 1912. They received support from some influential agrarians led by Conrad von Wangenheim. Nobility wanted to use Agricultural Housewives' Associations to strengthen their influences in rural areas and renew the old patriarchal hierarchies. Noblewomen were meant to lead the associations and promote scientific and technical progress in rural households. This was the way nobility wanted to use to include women in the program of improving living conditions in the countryside. They agreed to broaden the scope of women's independent activities. However, supporting emancipation of women was not their true objective. In reality, they aimed at using associations to slow down the migration of people from the countryside to the cities (Landflucht) since depopulation of the countryside was a serious issue in the eastern provinces of Prussia from the end of the nineteenth century, which caused a permanent shortage of labor in land estates.

Key words: Prussian Province of Pomerania, Pomeranian nobility, emancipation of women, Agricultural Housewives' Associations, Helene von Somnitz, Conrad von Wangenheim

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł omawia okoliczności w jakich część szlachty pruskiej prowincji Pomorze poparła Rolnicze Stowarzyszenia Gospodyń Domowych. Ten nowy typ organizacji kobiecych propagował umiarkowaną wersję emancypacji kobiet na obszarach wiejskich i został zapoczątkowany w Prusach Wschodnich w latach dziewięćdziesiątych XIX w. przez Elisabeth Boehm. W pruskiej prowincji Pomorze stowarzyszenia tego typu zaczęły zawiązywać się dopiero od 1912 roku dzięki poparciu części wpływowych szlacheckich konserwatywistów i agrariuszy na czele z Conradem baronem von Wangenheim. Za pośrednictwem Rolniczych Stowarzyszeń Gospodyń Domowych chcieli oni umocnić wpływy szlachty na obszarach wiejskich i odnowić dawne patriarchalne hierarchie. Na czele organizacji miały stać szlachcianki i promować postęp naukowo-techniczny w wiejskim gospodarstwie domowym. W ten sposób szlachta chciała włączyć kobiety w program poprawy warunków życia na wsi. Tym samym godziła się na poszerzenie zakresu ich samodzielności. Jej celem nie było jednak wspieranie umiarkowanej emancypacji kobiet, ale wykorzystanie stowarzyszeń do umocnienia wpływów szlachty na wsi i zahamowania migracji ludności do miast (Landflucht). Wyludnianie się wsi było od końca XIX w. ogromnym problemem we wschodnich prowincjach państwa pruskiego, gdyż powodowało stały brak rąk do pracy w majątkach ziemskich.

Słowa kluczowe: pruska prowincja Pomorze, szlachta pomorska, Rolnicze Stowarzyszenia Gospodyń Domowych, Helene von Somnitz, Conrad baron von Wangenheim

INTRODUCTION

The nobility from the eastern Prussian Province of Pomerania held clear-cut political views. They supported *Deutschkonservative Partei* (the German Conservative Party) that represented the interests of Protestant agrarians from the east. However, from 1890s the party was losing significance, and the speed of industrialization and related social changes

led to the emergence of a new political force in Germany. Following the abolition of the Anti-Socialist Laws in 1890, that force, Social Democrats, increased the number of its seats in Reichstag with every general election. The turning point came in 1912, when the German Conservative Party lost a third of its seats, while the Social Democratic Party of Germany became the strongest party in Reichstag¹.

From the perspective of East German nobility, and hence also Pomeranian noble class, the successes of Social Democrats indicated a moral crisis caused by the transformations built on aspirations to modernize all aspects of life. The nobility perceived progress as a threat to the social and political order that had secured them the leadership of the state. Although the agrarian reforms carried out in Prussia at the beginning of the nineteenth century had already shaken their position, the agricultural crisis of the 1870s, the rapid industrialization of united Germany and trade policy of Chancellor Leo von Caprivi increased the sense of danger. There was a growing conviction that the agrarian world of the nobility was fading away². A strive to maintain the political influence and position of dominance in eastern, rural provinces of Prussia compelled operations that Hans-Ulrich Wehler called defensive modernisation³. It meant incorporating manifestations of modernity into the concept of nobility (*Adeligkeit*) and nobility's lifestyle in such a way that allowed them to coexist with the tradition or even to preserve the tradition in a new industrial society⁴. The idea of defensive modernisation is therefore crucial in explaining what prompted at least a part of the nobility from the Prussian Province of Pomerania, the most agrarian of German eastern provinces, before the First World War to back *Landwirtschaftlicher Hausfrauenverein* (Agricultural Housewives' Associations) that offered a version of moderate emancipation of women in rural areas. Their programme included vocational education of women, professionalization of women's housework, paid employment and broadening the fields of their activity in the

¹ K. Heinsohn, *Konservative Parteien in Deutschland 1912 bis 1933. Demokratisierung und Partizipation in geschlechterhistorischer Perspektive*, Düsseldorf 2010, s. 26.

² R. Braun, *Konzeptionelle Bemerkungen zum „Obenbleiben“*. *Adel im 19. Jahrhundert*, w: *Europäischer Adel 1750–1950*, red. H.-U. Wehler, Göttingen 1990, s. 87–95; M. Seelig, *Der Kampf gegen die Moderne. Krisenwahrnehmung und -bewältigung im Deutschen Adelsblatt um 1900*, w: *Krisenwahrnehmungen in Deutschland um 1900. Zeitschriften als Foren der Umbruchzeit im wilhelminischen Reich*, red. M. Grunewald, U. Puschner, Bern 2010, s. 451–476.

³ H.-U. Wehler, *Teoria modernizacji a historia*, w: *Modernizacja, nacjonalizm, państwo. Eseje i artykuły*, red. idem, Warszawa 2001, s. 118.

⁴ A. Szudarek, *Jak stawić czoła nowoczesności? Dyskusja wokół wzorca niemieckiej szlachcianki na łamach „Deutsches Adelsblatt” na przełomie XIX i XX wieku*, „Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych” 2016, 76, s. 315–340.

public sphere. This article aims at explaining the circumstances in which that programme won the acceptance of nobility and how it became a tool of strengthening patriarchal hierarchies and dependencies in rural areas.

As noticed by an American historian Shelley Baranowski, when it came to cultural trends dominating the industrialized West, the Prussian Province of Pomerania was quite remote. At the end of the nineteenth century, the local nobility treated all signs of progress in farming with reserve⁵. They did not comprehend the purpose of industrialization of the country. Consequently, they did not understand social problems the large, modernizing cities dealt with, which facilitated the antagonism between the city and the countryside, a characteristic feature of the turn of the century⁶. They saw themselves as guardians of tradition and Protestant faith and supported the German Conservative Party – as did the entire conservative camp in the Wilhelmine Period – that represented their interests and was gradually moving towards the far right⁷. The biggest landowners from the province were involved in central and regional agricultural organisations, especially *Bund der Landwirte* (the Agrarian League) created in 1893, to show their protest against all what was believed to threaten the well-being of society in the countryside. These organisations tried to make a positive impact in response to economic policy of the country immersed in a farming crisis⁸.

Under those circumstances, all attempts to break away with a traditional order regarding gender roles and allow women to enter the spheres previously restricted for men were treated by nobility as a sign of the crisis of values and a breach of Protestant vision of family. Therefore, they were deemed unacceptable in rural areas of the province that represented a „pre-modern order”⁹.

Elisabet Boehm and her program of moderate emancipation of women in rural areas

⁵ S. Baranowski, *The Sanctity of Rural Life. Nobility, Protestantism, and Nazism in Weimar Prussia*, New York–Oxford 1995, s. 8, 27–34; I. Buchsteiner, *Wirtschaftlicher und sozialer Wandel in ostdeutschen Gutswirtschaft vor 1914*, „Archiv für Sozialgeschichte” 1996, 36, s. 107–108; W. Stepiński, *Społeczeństwo wiejskie*, w: *Historia Pomorza (1850–1918). Ustrój, gospodarka, społeczeństwo*, t. 4, cz. 1, red. S. Salmonowicz, Toruń 2000, s. 351.

⁶ K. Bergmann, *Agrarromantik und Großstadtfeindschaft*, Meisenheim/Glan 1970.

⁷ O. Heilbronner, *Conservatism*, w: *The Ashgate Research Companion to Imperial Germany*, red. M. Jefferies, Farnham 2015, s. 117.

⁸ H.-J. Puhle, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik und Preussischer Konservatismus im wilhelminischen Reich (1893–1914). Ein Beitrag zur Analyse des Nationalismus in Deutschland am Beispiel des Bundes der Landwirte und der Deutsch-Konservativen Partei*, Hannover 1966.

⁹ S. Baranowski, *op. cit.*, s. 8.

In 1898, the *Landfrauenbewegung* (agrarian women's movement) began. It developed chiefly in the eastern provinces of the country where Agricultural Housewives' Associations were established. The movement spread to the entire Germany only during, and especially after, the First World War¹⁰. The first association was established in Rastenburg (today Kętrzyn) in East Prussia in accordance with the concept developed by Elisabet Boehm. The founder wanted her organisation as well as others modelled on it to join *Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine* (Federation of German Women's Associations). This umbrella association was established in 1894 for organisations involved in bourgeois women's movement that took various approaches to the woman question, from demanding voting rights for both sexes to operating with a sole purpose of preparing women professionally to perform household tasks¹¹. A way to cooperation was paved by shared elements of the agenda of Agricultural Housewives' Associations and moderate bourgeois women's movement. Federation of German Women's Associations did not back radical slogans. It reflected aspirations of moderate bourgeois women's movement such as to improve women's education and widen gainful employment opportunities for middle and upper-class women. Agricultural Housewives' Associations also addressed those demands and popularized the concept that women need professional preparation to do household works and could take over some branches of farming, such as poultry, fruit and vegetable farming or beekeeping. That is why they promoted women's vocational training based on the newest achievements of agronomy and zootechnics to professionalize women's activities and broaden the scope of the tasks they could perform. According to Elisabet Boehm, that programme was aimed at both peasant women and wives of landowners. In both cases, it meant breaking away with the old way of approaching the role of women in rural areas. In peasant families women's housework was not appreciated as they were expected first and foremost to work the land. Associations, on the contrary, wanted the productivization of peasant women to be based on the household that was to become their sphere of autonomic activity. Noblewomen also wanted

¹⁰ E.B. Jones, *Gender and Rural Modernity: Farm Women and the Politics of Labor in Germany, 1871–1933*, Farnham 2009; R. Bridenthal, *Professional Housewives: Stepsisters of the Women's Movement*, w: *When Biology Became Destiny. Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, red. R. Bridenthal, A. Grossmann, M. Kaplan, New York 1984, s. 153–173; eadem, *Organized Rural Women in the Conservative Mobilisation of the German Countryside in the Weimar Republic*, w: *Between Reform, Reaction and Resistance. Studies in the History of German Conservatism from 1789 to 1945*, red. L.E. Jones, J.N. Retallack, Oxford 1993, s. 375–405; N.R. Reagin, *A German Women's Movement. Class and Gender in Hanover, 1880–1933*, Chapel Hill and London 1995, s. 187–202.

¹¹ M. Wegner, *Merkbuch der Frauenbewegung*, Leipzig–Berlin 1908, s. 8.

to break away with the old model defining women's tasks in rural estates. Earlier the latter included chiefly supervision of domestic servants and care of the sick and handicapped from nearby villages, now their involvement in agricultural production, recognized after all as a male domain, was intended to lead to a significant expansion of the scope of duties¹².

Such form of association also required establishing cooperation with agricultural organisations of landowners as only they had the means allowing for the transfer of agricultural knowledge that women needed. The association's programme included further training courses as well as produce shows, and especially, setting up kiosks to sell fruits of women's work. This also engaged urban women in the work of Agricultural Housewives' Associations, which emphasized their special nature as they acted beyond social divisions, integrating women from urban and rural areas¹³.

Elisabet Boehm did not hide her fascination for moderate bourgeois women's movement. She remained in touch with them via her sister-in-law, Hanna Bieber-Boehm¹⁴, who at that time was a member of Federation's board. In 1904, Elisabet Boehm also participated in the Federation's General Assembly. The ambition to incorporate Agricultural Housewives' Associations in East Prussia into the Federation of German Women's Associations resulted in the lack of support from local nobility for agrarian women's movement. They called Elisabet Boehm „a blue stocking” and criticized her for her attempts to plant moderate bourgeois women's movement's programme in rural areas. Moreover, already in 1904 she received first letters from owners of smaller and larger farms demanding an immediate stop to her propaganda. As emphasized by Brigitte Kerchner, peasant men's objections against Agricultural Housewives' Associations did not arise from disputing their programme. They were concerned by contacts between their wives and activists of moderate bourgeois women's movement. In their opinion, the contacts would stir up women's interest in politics and pave the way for their independence, which would lead to the abolition of traditional

¹² G. Heinrich, *Staatsdienst und Rittergut. Die Geschichte der Familie von Dewitz in Brandenburg, Mecklenburg und Pommern*, Bonn 1990, s. 186; Ch. Graf von Krockow, *Die Reise nach Pommern. Bericht aus einem verschwiegenen Land*, Stuttgart 1985, s. 151; A. Schwarzer, *Marion Dönhoff. Życie pod prąd*, Warszawa 1999, s. 29.

¹³ A. Sawahn, *Die Frauenlobby vom Land. Die Landfrauenbewegung in Deutschland und ihre Funktionärinnen 1898 bis 1948*, Frankfurt am Main 2009, s. 69–70.

¹⁴ R.J. Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany 1894–1933*, London–Beverly Hills 1976, s. 39, 41–47, 49–50; K. Bürger, *Bieber-Böhm, Hanna Elmira Flora*, Kulturportal West-Ost, <https://kulturportal-west-ost.eu/biographien/bieber-bohm-hanna-elmira-flora-2> [dostęp: 20 III 2020].

model of marriage based on women's obedience, loyalty and fidelity¹⁵. Such voices, however, did not stop the associations from expanding their ranks. In 1908, twenty-two such organisations operated in East Prussia only, including in total 1,400 female members¹⁶, and among them a significant number of wives of big landowners¹⁷. It should be noted that organisations involving noblewomen clearly emphasized their economic character. They rejected engaging in solving social problems that were referred to in the agenda of moderate bourgeois women's movement. Nevertheless, a few Agricultural Housewives' Associations shared Elisabet Boehm's views and joined the Federation of German Women's Associations. Until 1908, two of them decided to take this step: one from Lyck (today Ełk) in East Prussia and the other from Neukirch (today Nowa Cerkiew) in West Prussia¹⁸.

For nobility emphasising links between Agricultural Housewives' Associations and the Federation of German Women's Associations equalled politicising agrarian women's movement. Although in its programme the Federation of German Women's Associations distanced itself from politics, among its members were organisations demanding voting rights for women, and Federation did not firmly reject this demand. It was, however, meant as the last one to be raised only after others, more important in the eyes of female members, had been fulfilled. In those circumstances, the nobility in East Prussia perceived the activity of Elisabet Boehm as a threat to the conservative outlook of the countryside. Nonetheless, in the following years she managed to develop a model of cooperation with male agricultural organisations, including the East Prussian *Landwirtschaftskammer* (the Chamber of Agriculture) while keeping her contacts with the Federation of German Women's Associations, which in case of Agricultural Housewives' Associations was not expected to coexist¹⁹. Incremental overcoming of reluctance was facilitated by increased quality and profitability of rural economy offered by those organisations. Agrarians also spotted their other edge. These associations acted for the modernisation of female-led households and therefore improved living conditions in peas-

¹⁵ B. Kerchner, *Beruf und Geschlecht. Frauenberufsverbände in Deutschland 1848–1908*, Göttingen 1992, s. 64.

¹⁶ M. Wegner, *op. cit.*, s. 133.

¹⁷ Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin-Dahlem [dalej: GStA PK], Rep. 87 B, Nr. 20546, s. 7.

¹⁸ Agricultural Housewives' Associations in Ełk was established in 1904 and in 1908 had 105 female members. It was led by Mrs Gaupnin from Rothof near Gdańsk. In 1906, a by far smaller Agricultural Housewives' Association was established in Neukirch with Mrs Zimmer at the helm. In 1908, it had 38 female members. M. Wegner, *op. cit.*, s. 90, 108.

¹⁹ B. Kerchner, *op. cit.*, s. 64.

ant households, so they could join the fight against the exodus of people from rural to urban areas (*Landflucht*). And for owners of big land estates in eastern provinces of Prussia the shortage of labour was a serious problem at the end of the nineteenth century²⁰.

In the following years, the network of Agricultural Housewives' Associations expanded both in East and West Prussia. In 1913, there were thirty-five of them in East Prussia with 2,400 female members. However, already from 1905 they started to merge into *Verband der Ostpreussischen Landwirtschaftlichen Hausfrauenvereine* (the Agricultural Housewives' Association of East Prussia). A similar umbrella organisation was established in 1910 in West Prussia. Then, the network of associations was expanding further: in 1911 they were established in the Province of Posen and the Province of Brandenburg, in 1912 in the Province of Pomerania, and in 1913 in Silesia and Schleswig-Holstein²¹.

AGRICULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS AND THE WORK OF ELISABET BOEHM

Finally, due to the support provided by some influential agrarians who were close to the governmental circles, such as especially Conrad von Wangenheim and Hans Graf von Schwerin-Löwitz, at the beginning of 1914 the Ministry of Agriculture backed the concept of cooperation between Agricultural Housewives' Associations and the Chambers of Agriculture in the provinces of Prussia. The Ministry also agreed to subordinate the associations to its advisory body, *Königlich-Preussisches Landesökonomiekollegium* (the Prussian Board of Agriculture). For that purpose associations formed a hierarchical structure with *Preussischer Landesverband Landwirtschaftlicher Hausfrauenvereine* (the Prussian Federation of Agricultural Housewives' Associations) appointed on 17 February 1914, as its head organisation. It comprised provincial Agricultural Housewives' Associations already set up in East Prussia, West Prussia, Pomerania and Schleswig-Holstein²².

²⁰ R. Schiller, *Vom Rittergut zum Großgrundbesitz. Ökonomische und soziale Transformationsprozesse der ländliche Eliten in Brandenburg im 19. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 2003, s. 75–81; K. Saul, *Um die konservative Struktur Ostelbiens. Agrarische Interessen, Staatsverwaltung und ländliche „Arbeiternot“ in Preußen-Deutschland 1889–1914*, w: *Deutscher Konservatismus im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Festschrift für Fritz Fischer zum 75. Geburtstag und 50. Doktorjubiläum*, red. D. Stegmann, B.-J. Wendt, P.-Ch. Witt, Bonn 1983, s. 129–198.

²¹ Ch. Schwarz, F. von Natzmer, *„Frauen im Zeichen der Biene“ – die Geschichte der deutschen Landfrauenbewegung*, w: *Elisabet Boehm und die Landfrauenbewegung*, red. Ostpreussisches Landesmuseum Lüneburg, Husum 1998, s. 32; M. Wegner, *op. cit.*, s. 113.

²² The then adopted charter of the association read that its objective was to further train women in various areas related to a countryside household, tackle the outflow of

Another form of help was the financial support provided every year by the Ministry of Agriculture for their operation, especially for expanding the network of associations in provinces²³.

For Elisabeth Boehm the cooperation with organisations of agrarians did not mean renouncing contacts with moderate bourgeois women's movement. Moreover, before 1914 she convinced the most influential figures from those circles that they would be better off with developing and strengthening agrarian women's movement and should consider the option of the Prussian Federation of Agricultural Housewives' Association joining the Federation of German Women's Associations. Such motion was laid in June 1913 by Conrad von Wangenheim in front of the boards of the Prussian Chambers of Agriculture during their session in Wiesbaden. He let Elisabeth Boehm, also invited to the meeting, do the briefing. It had not been her first intervention before such influential figures. Thanks to the support from some senior bureaucrats from East Prussia, she had already spoken to influential agrarians seeking their support for her associations. Her interventions had widespread repercussions as it was a common belief that women were incompetent when it came to agricultural enterprises and should not be allowed to speak about it in public. However, the founder of agrarian women's movement forced landowners to revise their views on this issue. In her speech she brought their attention to the growing significance of moderate bourgeois women's movement and emphasized that it only represented interests of women from large cities. Moreover, in her opinion the movement was gaining strength and could soon transform into a political one. She believed they should not remain passive; as long as it was still possible and while agrarian women's movement remained neutral, it should be brought into the structures of the Federation of German Women's Associations to push it into the direction that would be beneficial for countrywomen and hence for agrarians²⁴. Although some members of her audience expressed doubts about the proposed solution, a perspective of taking over the control of moderate bourgeois women's movement led to what Elisabeth Boehm had expected to achieve. She received support from agricultural organisations without the need to renounce her con-

people from rural areas, and establish cooperation between urban and countryside women to provide the former with fresh produce and to give the latter additional income from the sales. The association comprised thirty-five associations from East Prussia, fourteen from West Prussia, six from Pomerania and Posen, and four from Schleswig-Holstein. GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 87 B, Nr. 20546, s. 28, 31; A. Sawahn, *op. cit.*, s. 67.

²³ GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 87 B, Nr. 20546, s. 20; Nr. 20609, s. 9.

²⁴ GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 87 B, Nr. 20546, s. 91–92.

tacts with the Federation of German Women's Associations, something she was being forced to do in her native East Prussia. Representatives of the Prussian Chambers of Agriculture agreed to cooperate with Agricultural Housewives' Associations on the condition that the discussion on them joining the Federation of German Women's Associations should be held no sooner than when the organisation became a real power. From their perspective, only in such a situation could it impact the programme of moderate bourgeois women's movement. Such solution was also recommended by the Minister of Agriculture Hans von Schwerin-Löwitz, the president of the Prussian Board of Agriculture²⁵.

The session in Wiesbaden revealed the strategy towards agrarian and bourgeois women's movements developed by the circles of Conrad von Wangenheim and Hans von Schwerin-Löwitz, two influential representatives of the nobility from the Province of Pomerania. This strategy allowed to partly explain the circumstances in which Agricultural Housewives' Associations, which after all chose planting the programme of moderate emancipation in rural areas as their objective, were taken over by agrarians from the eastern provinces of Prussia and used for their own purposes that formed a part of their programme of defensive modernisation²⁶.

In the process of taking control over Agricultural Housewives' Associations a key role was played by Conrad von Wangenheim. He owned an estate in Klein-Spiegel (today Poźrzadło Małe) in the Province of Pomerania and was a deputy of the German Conservative Party to the Prussian Landtag and to the German Reichstag. Since 1898, he had been the president of the Agrarian League, and since 1913 the president of the Chamber of Agriculture in Szczecin. His close ally Hans Graf von Schwerin-Löwitz, also from the Province of Pomerania, had similar organisational and political links. He had been the president of the Pomeranian Chamber of Agriculture before Conrad von Wangenheim, and since 1901 the president of the Prussian Board of Agriculture. As a deputy of the German Conservative Party he also took his seat in parliament and was the President of the Reichstag between 1910 and 1912²⁷. Both prominent figures represented the interests

²⁵ GStA PK, I. HA, Rep. 87 B, Nr. 20546, s. 6.

²⁶ See more: A. Szudarek, *Femina oeconomica. Fighting against Landflucht in the Program of Agrarian Women's Movement in Prussia before the Outbreak of World War I*, „*Studia Historiae Oeconomicae*” 2019, 37, 1, s. 25–45.

²⁷ H. Spenkuch, *Schwerin, Hans Graf von*, w: *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 24, 2010, s. 76–77, <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd117422355.html#ndbcontent> [dostęp: 25 III 2020].

of supporters of the German Conservative Party linked to big landownership and interested in strengthening their influences in rural areas²⁸.

THE BREAKTHROUGH OF 1912. DETERMINANTS OF A CONSERVATIVE TURN

The opening of the discussion about Agricultural Housewives' Associations during the session of the boards of Prussian Chambers of Agriculture in June 1913 should be considered not only as a continuation of Elisabeth Boehm's efforts to establish cooperation with organisations of landowners. It seemed to be first and foremost a continuation of actions of the group representing the interests of conservative agrarians following the defeat of the German Conservative Party in the Reichstag elections at the beginning of 1912. These actions originated from their aspiration to rebuild and strengthen this formation's influences and hence transforming it into a popular party²⁹. Conservatives feared losing further votes as a result of intensified social democratic propaganda in rural areas. They saw agrarian eastern provinces of Prussia as their natural backyard. Appreciating women's impact on the family and upbringing of children, they decided to take over agrarian women's movement to strengthen their influences in the countryside. According to Conrad von Wangenheim, during the above-mentioned session in Wiesbaden this was a post-election priority issue. The development of Agricultural Housewives' Associations should be supported and controlled through subordinating it to male agricultural organisations³⁰. To construct a new image of associations, which were now supposed to come under the auspices of the state, they used an idea employed earlier at schools of rural household for middle and upper-class women. The concept was developed by Ida von Kortzfleisch, the founder of schools of rural household for upper-class women. She believed theoretical and practical preparations to work in rural households were an act of patriotism and a way for other women to show their national feelings. Elisabeth Boehm was also getting keener to take on such

²⁸ D. Ziblatt, *Weak Party Conservatism and the Case of Germany*, w: D. Ziblatt, *Conservative Parties and the Birth of Democracy*, Cambridge 2017, s. 191–201; H.W. von Koeller, *Die Pommersche Landwirtschaftskammer. Entwicklung und Leistung von der Gründung bis zum Ausbruch des Ersten Weltkrieges*, Köln–Weimar–Wien 1999, s. 46–48; I. Buchsteiner, *Izba Rolnicza prowincji Pomorze Zachodnie w latach 1896–1914*, „Zapiski Historyczne” 1996, 61, 4, s. 69–70; H. Freiherr von Wangenheim, *Conrad Freiherr von Wangenheim (1849–1926)*, w: *Pommersche Lebensbilder. Pommern des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 1, Stettin 1934, s. 356.

²⁹ J.N. Retallack, *Notables of the Right. The Conservative Party and Political Mobilization in Germany, 1876–1918*, Boston–London 1988, s. 179–190.

³⁰ GStA PK, I. HA, Rep. 87 B, Nr. 20546, s. 11.

an approach as her views were gradually moving towards nationalism, similarly to the majority of women's organisations operating in eastern provinces of Prussia³¹. These were the circumstances in which Agricultural Housewives' Associations set up in further provinces were meant to operate. The demands of emancipation written in their programmes were hedged in a nationalistic and conservative narration. For women the work in associations was becoming a patriotic duty towards the motherland and the necessity to engage in building the economic power of Germany. Such a reinterpretation of associations' programme was a reflection of a general evolution of the conservative camp towards the far right³². Special hopes were attached to the abovementioned cross-class nature of Agricultural Housewives' Associations. This meant that a conservative and patriotic interpretation of women's engagement impacted not only lower classes in the countryside but also women from neighbouring urban areas. Hence, the radical – from nobility's point of view – bourgeois women's movement would not be transferred to the countryside; to the contrary, the conservative agrarian women's movement would make an impact on urban female activists.

Women with links to big landownership, especially from the nobility, were to become depositories of the tradition and simultaneously propagators of modernity in the countryside. As presidents of their associations, they became responsible for transferring modern methods of running a household to peasant homes. That was meant to rebuild old ties between peasant households and noble manors. Alongside creating that modernized form of patriarchal dependency, their other task was to stop social democratic propaganda in the countryside. These were the outcomes expected from politicising women's work in households. Making it a duty for the country was meant to strengthen identification of peasants' and agricultural workers' families with the monarchy and its aspirations to become a power.

Changing the narration of Agricultural Housewives' Associations turned out to be a difficult task. Support of the elites was not enough to expand the structures. Winning the favours of rank and file, nobility was also required as they still played a leading role in rural areas of eastern

³¹ The two women established cooperation. Ida von Kortzfleisch backed Elisabet Boehm in her efforts to open an economic school for women, which was established in 1912 in Metgethen, near Königsberg. See O. Wörner-Heil, *Adelige Frauen als Pionierinnen der Berufsbildung. Die ländliche Hauswirtschaft und der Reifensteiner Verband*, Kassel 2010, s. 19–20, 42–44, 70–72.

³² O. Heilbronner, *op. cit.*, s. 117–119.

provinces of Prussia³³. Without their permission it was difficult to establish further associations and the cooperation with district agricultural societies of landowners and engaging noblewomen from rural estates became impossible. Only they were able to pacify potential voices of discontent among the peasants. The slogan to modernize female-led households, and contacts between associations and the Federation of German Women's Associations in particular did not win the trust of conservative nobility as shown on the example of the Province of Pomerania. A year after the lectures of Elisabet Boehm inspired by Conrad von Wangenheim, the first Agricultural Housewives' Associations were established in April 1912 in Słupsk, Koszalin and Łębork. They were expected to be followed by further associations that could then merge into a provincial association³⁴. However, the months were passing by and no information about new Pomeranian organisations came. What is more, members of the Chamber of Agriculture in the Province of Pomerania were not keen to enter a tight cooperation with the existing ones despite the fact the president of the Chamber was in favour of it. Local agrarians perceived the contacts with moderate bourgeois women's movement as political participation of women and therefore saw it as an obstacle³⁵.

No similar concerns about contacting moderate bourgeois women's movement were present among at least some upper-class women. Though Elisabet Boehm complained about nobility's opposition in East Prussia, the example of the Province of Pomerania indicated universality of such an attitude. In Pomerania, cooperation of the conservative women's association and the moderate bourgeois women's movement was frictionless. It was true for both Vaterländischer Frauenverein (Patriotic Women's League), developing systematically in this area from the end of 1860s³⁶, and a network of branches of Deutsch-Evangelischer Frauenbund (German Protestant Women's Association) that was engaged in various forms

³³ I. Buchsteiner, *Besitzkontinuität, Besitzwechsel und Besitzverlust in den Gutswirtschaften Pommerns 1871–1918*, w: *Ostelbische Agrargesellschaft im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik: Agrarkrise-junkerliche Interessenpolitik-Modernisierungsstrategien*, red. H. Reif, Berlin 1994, s. 125–140; W. Stępiński, *op. cit.*, s. 307–308.

³⁴ L. Maass, *Wirtschaftliche Frauenaufgaben in der inneren Kolonisation*, „Archiv für Innere Kolonisation“ 1912, 4, 8, s. 413.

³⁵ GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 87 B, Nr. 20546, s. 11.

³⁶ R. Chickering, „Casting Their Gaze More Broadly”: Women's Patriotic Activism in Imperial Germany, „Past & Present” February 1988, 118, 1, s. 162–167; D. Mellies, *Modernisierung in der preußischen Provinz. Der Regierungsbezirk Stettin im 19. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2012, s. 294–295; A. Chlebowska, *Pod znakiem Czerwonego Krzyża. Patriotyczne Stowarzyszenie Kobiet w Szczecinie (1869–1914) jako organizacja z nurtu ruchu kobiecego wspieranego przez państwo pruskie*, „Przegląd Zachodniopomorski” 2007, 22, 1, s. 39–66.

of social work, since 1908 a member of the Federation of German Women's Associations. This is especially important as in Pomeranian branches of the German Protestant Women's Association, operating mostly in the eastern part of the province, e.g. in Koszalin, Słupsk, Lębork and Sławno, a significant role was played by noblewomen from old Pomeranian families: Anna von Kleist from Słupsk, Helene von der Osten from Jannewitz (today Janowice), near Lębork, and representatives of the von Puttkamer family from Koszalin and from Lossin (today Łosin), near Słupsk. Maria, the wife of an influential agrarian Hans von Schwerin-Löwitz, a close ally of Conrad von Wangenheim was also an activist³⁷.

The rural areas of the Province of Pomerania did not notice the events in Berlin from the beginning of 1912 that allowed the elite of conservative agrarians to think that nobility could change its attitude towards the Federation of German Women's Associations and support noblewomen engaged in agrarian women's movement. In the years running up to the war, information about the intensification of women suffrage campaign in Great Britain was flowing in, and the Federation of German Women's Associations put a special emphasis on its neutrality in terms of whether women should be given voting rights, which Elisabet Boehm emphasized multiple times in her speeches to eastern Prussian agrarians. A key aspect of its programme was to get women involved in the works of self-governing institutions doing the modern welfare work. The Federation of German Women's Associations did not pursue confrontation with the state. They aspired to cooperate. In addition, its care and education activities formed a common ground with activities of conservative women societies. This cooperation manifested itself in a well-known Berliner exhibition entitled *Die Frau in Haus und Beruf* (The Woman in House and Profession) on display from February 24 to March 24, 1912, and was accompanied by a few-day's congress of women's associations (February 27 –March 2). It was organized under the auspices of the Empress Augusta Victoria by female activists from the Federation of German Women's Associations and aimed at presenting the contribution of the women's movement to the progress of culture and civilisation that modernized subsequent spheres of life at the turn of the century. The exhibition was not a tool in the battle for women's rights. It only presented trailblazing ideas, new forms of activities and results of actions brought about by women's organisations with chiefly

³⁷ *Kongreß für Innere Mission, „Pommersche Hausfreund“* 27 August 1911, 35, s. 139–140; A. Süchting-Hänger, *Das „Gewissen der Nation“. Nationales Engagement und politisches Handeln konservativer Frauenorganisationen 1900 bis 1937*, Düsseldorf 2002, s. 86; U. Baumann, *Protestantismus und Frauenemanzipation in Deutschland 1850 bis 1920*, Frankfurt am Main–New York 1992, s. 218.

moderate and conservative agendas³⁸. It aimed at raising the awareness of the elites about the necessity to redefine the position of women in the family and society and signal that the women's movement became a power that could no longer be disregarded. Agricultural Housewives' Associations also participated in these events. They had an opportunity to present to the wider public various forms of their activities corresponding with the concept of the Women's Year of Service (*weibliches Dienstjahr*) promoted during the congress of women's organisation that concluded the exhibition³⁹. The Women's Year of Service was understood as organized, common and compulsory preparations for girls to perform mother's tasks in a household, an equivalent of compulsory army training for men. It was interpreted as fulfilling a duty towards the motherland, which fitted into the patriotic and nationalistic tone of narration of the Wilhelmine Period⁴⁰.

The Berliner exhibition reverberated also during the winter session of the Reichstag⁴¹ and it seemed to finally make conservative and agrarian elites realize the significance of the women's movement and the necessity to establish cooperation. Moreover, conservatives' electoral defeat in 1912 was an equally painful experience for female members of the elite. They feared Social Democrats and a break-up of the existing social order. At the beginning of March, they started a press campaign to direct the attention of conservatives to the potential of women's organisations. *Neue Preußische Zeitung Kreuzzeitung* published an article by Helene von Somnitz from Freest (today Wrześć) in the Province of Pomerania, with links to the German Protestant Women's Association, who was soon to become the main female activist of agrarian women's movement in the Province of Pomerania⁴². She emphasized that it was high time for women to learn how to properly assess political issues and manifest their views. She obviously did not mean to manifest for the right to vote, but rather

³⁸ A. Schaser, *Helene Lange und Gertrud Bäumer. Eine politische Lebensgemeinschaft*, Köln-Weimar-Wien 2010, s. 151–153.

³⁹ A. Sawahn, *op. cit.*, s. 73–74.

⁴⁰ Ch. Schwarz, *Die Landfrauenbewegung in Deutschland. Zur Geschichte einer Frauenorganisation unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Jahre 1898 bis 1933*, Mainz 1990, s. 142, 145; E. Gnauck-Kühne, *Die Frage des „weiblichen Dienstjahrs“*, w: *Der Deutsche Frauenkongress, Berlin, 27. Februar bis 2. März. Sämtliche Vorträge herausgegeben im Auftrage des Vorstandes des Bundes Deutscher Frauenvereine von Dr. Gertrud Bäumer*, Berlin 1912, s. 24–38.

⁴¹ The exhibition was referred to during the debate on social issues. *Verhandlungen des Reichstages*, vol. 283, *Stenographische Berichte*. 16. Sitzung. Donnerstag den 29. Februar 1912, Berlin 1912, s. 339.

⁴² A. Süchting-Hänger, *op. cit.*, s. 83; K. Heinsohn, *Konservative*, s. 31–32; U. Planert, *Antifeminismus im Kaiserreich. Diskurs, soziale Formation und politische Mentalität*, Göttingen 1998, s. 111–112.

saw it as an issue of proper upbringing of children, understood as a way to express their concerns about the fate of the future generations. She demanded that mothers strengthen traditional values and commitment to the monarchy among their offspring as well as their servants, and among all workers in rural estates⁴³. Such a narration was also present in another article that soon followed the first one in the same periodical. The author-ess, who signed her texts as „a Countess”, accused conservatives that their election result would have been better, if they had appreciated the importance of properly politically educated women’s impact on their own family circles and their ability to convey the attachment to traditional values to their children⁴⁴.

The offer of cooperation from upper-class females, who were aware of the necessity to get involved in rescuing social order that was vital to their identity, did not go unnoticed. The conservative and agrarian circle’s view of it was not unanimous⁴⁵. The mobilisation of women needed to exclude the possibility of them entering the spheres traditionally dominated by men, and that first and foremost meant politics. This issue was specifically emphasized at the end of 1912 when the German Conservative Party finally declared via *Vossische Zeitung* its readiness to cooperate with women. The party agreed that women could promote conservative values in social life and recognized the validity of their ambitions to improve women’s education and pursuing gainful economic activities within „reasonable” limits⁴⁶.

Such position was a necessary minimum to accept the programme. In a country under modernization it had become necessary to strengthen the attachment to tradition in women responsible for bringing up next generations of voters. It required new tools to influence not only urban women yielding to the „temptation of modernity”, but also women from rural areas. The countryside had been an unyielding backyard of German

⁴³ U. Planert, *op. cit.*, s. 111–112; eadem, *Nation, Politik, und Geschlecht. Frauenbewegung und Nationalismus in der Moderne*, Frankfurt am Main 2000, s. 218, 224.

⁴⁴ J.N. Retallack, *op. cit.*, s. 184–185.

⁴⁵ Those most hostile towards the growing women’s movement believed people should not yield to a „false modernization” and should fight against the emancipation of women and all liberal and social democratic tendencies in society. These views were expressed by establishing in June 1912 an organisation called the German League for the Prevention of Women’s Emancipation (*Deutscher Bund zur Bekämpfung der Frauenemanzipation*), including a few members of the German Conservative Party. U. Planert, *Mannweiber, Urniden und sterile Jungfern. Die Frauenbewegung und ihre Gegner im Kaiserreich*, „Feministische Studien” 2000, 18, 11, s. 27; D.J. Guido, *The German League for the Prevention of Women’s Emancipation. Antifeminism in Germany 1912–1920*, Bern 2010, s. 23–36; K. Heinsohn, *Konservative*, s. 29.

⁴⁶ K. Heinsohn, *Konservative*, s. 41–42.

and conservative spirits and as such remained a focus. The experiences of nationalists also made them more inclined to verify their attitude towards the activity of women in the public sphere, so they established women-only affiliates by their organisations, such as Deutscher Ostmarkenverein (German Eastern Marches Society)⁴⁷.

A GROWTH CONTROLLED: AGRARIAN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN THE PROVINCE OF POMERANIA AS A TOOL IN THE POLICY OF CONSERVATIVE NOBLEMEN

The failures in the Province of Pomerania, where Conrad von Wangenheim had unsuccessfully tried to develop a network of Agricultural Housewives' Associations since 1912, led to two major conclusions. The idea to use the agrarian women's movement to strengthen conservative social order will not succeed without the support of the monarchy for Agricultural Housewives' Associations, and without the confirmation that new fields of women's activities would not threaten a traditional worldview of women. The monarchy's support for agrarian women's movement – as mentioned above – was achieved no sooner than the beginning of the 1914. Much earlier, on the other hand, an organisation that became a tool to fulfil the second of the abovementioned conditions, was established. To certain surprise of some observers of political life in Germany, on 9 April 1913, *Vereinigung Konservativer Frauen* (the Union of Conservative Women) was formed. The core of the board included the leaders of the Evangelical and conservative circles (Paula Mueller and Bertha von Kröcher⁴⁸) and noblewomen related to the leaders of the German Conservative Party, including Ernst von Heydebrand und der Larsa, Pomerania-born Oskar von Norman and Hans von Schwerin from Löwitz⁴⁹. The membership of the board and the programme that remained within the conservative scope indicated that the establishment of the organisation was not an accident. The initial distance that the German Conservative Party and the Union of

⁴⁷ Eadem, *Das konservative Dilemma und die Frauen. Anmerkungen zum Scheitern eines republikanischen Konservatismus in Deutschland 1912 bis 1930*, w: „Ich bin der letzte Preuße“. *Der politische Lebensweg des konservativen Politikers Kuno Graf von Westarp (1864–1945)*, red. L.E. Jones, W. Pyta, Köln–Weimar–Wien 2006, s. 82; U. Planert, *Kulturkritik und Geschlechterverhältnis. Zur Krise der Geschlechterordnung zwischen Jahrhundertwende und „Drittem Reich“*, w: *Ordnungen in der Krise. Zur politischen Kulturgeschichte Deutschlands 1900–1933*, red. W. Hardtwig, München 2007, s. 196–197; P. Walkenhorst, *Nation–Volk–Rasse. Radikaler Nationalismus im Deutschen Kaiserreich 1890–1914*, Göttingen 2011, s. 137–140.

⁴⁸ U. Baumann, *op. cit.*, s. 218.

⁴⁹ K. Heinsohn, *Konservative*, s. 41–46.

Conservative Women kept was a form of negotiation leading to the elimination of the option to include female activists in the party structures. Such an attitude was meant to win over the opponents of cooperation with women. Despite the resistance of some members of the German Conservative Party who were far from willing to yield to women's demands, the Union of Conservative Women was recognized by it⁵⁰ and until the end of its existence (1918) was a kind of honorary club of its supporters⁵¹. The Union of Conservative Women did not play a major role but it revealed the abilities to mobilize noble-class female conservatives from rural areas and their allegiance to tradition. In the first year of its operation, twenty-four branches of this organisation were formed in Germany, with the highest number of them in eastern provinces of Prussia. Their helms were mostly taken by noblewomen related to landowners and, at the same time, wives of members of the German Conservative Party⁵². In the Province of Pomerania these were the chairwomen of local branches of the Union of Conservative Women: Helene von der Osten from Jannewitz (today Janowice), the wife of major Leopold von der Osten, a conservative and chairman of *Bezirksabteilung Pommern der Deutschen Adelsgenossenschaft* (the Pomeranian branch of German Nobles' Cooperative), herself a female activist in local structure of the German Protestant Women's Association as well as the Patriotic Women's League and Baroness zu Putlitz from Barskewitz (today Baszkowice), near Stargard, the wife of Wolfgang Gans Edler Herr zu Putlitz, a landowner, in 1907–1918 a deputy from the German Conservative Party in the Reichstag and a member of the Agrarian League⁵³. The fact that Pomeranian noblewomen quickly joined the structures of the Union of Conservative Women confirms particular conservative influences in the province and the readiness for quick mobilisation among conservative women who were willing to defend the existing social order.

The establishment of further branches of the Union of Conservative Women in the Province of Pomerania created favourable climate for expansion of the Agricultural Housewives' Associations' network. However, their subordination to agricultural organisations and the support from the monarchy for this new type of women's activity was of key significance. Although the outbreak of war altered the conditions and facilitated the development of those organisations, at this point it could already be observed that the strategy adopted by the group of, among others, Conrad

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, s. 41.

⁵¹ J.N. Retallack, *op. cit.*, s. 185; K. Heinsohn, *Konservative*, s. 46–47.

⁵² A. Sawahn, *op. cit.*, s. 98–99.

⁵³ *Die Vereinigung konservativer Frauen*, „Die Gutsfrau. Halbmonatsschrift für die gebildeten Frauen auf dem Lande“ 1 June 1914, 17, s. 282–283.

von Wangenheim bore fruit for the first time. On 14 October 1913, various Pomeranian Agricultural Housewives' Associations formed *Verband Landwirtschaftlicher Hausfrauenvereine der Provinz Pommern* (the Pomeranian Agricultural Housewives' Association). Initially, it comprised only four associations established in 1912⁵⁴. However, two more joined them at the turn of 1914, and more in spring 1914. In total, nine associations operated before the outbreak of the war in Słupsk, Koszalin, Lębork, Sławno, Połczyn, Białogard, Stargard, Greifswald and Szczecin⁵⁵. Their leader was Helene von Somnitz, who in spring 1912 was a recognized supporter of activation of upper-class women. What is important, agrarian women's movement in the Province of Pomerania not only tried to mobilize women from rural areas but, first and foremost, make an impact on cities that did not share agrarians' conservative views. After all, headquarters of associations were not located in the countryside but in cities. Also, the first assembly of associations from the Pomeranian Agricultural Housewives' Association took place in January 1914 in Szczecin, the province's largest and most industrialized city. Helene von Somnitz from the beginning of her work had been cooperating with associations of moderate bourgeois women's movement from Pomerania. In April 1914, she took part in Szczecin's assembly of the branches of *Allgemeiner Deutsche Frauenverein* (the General German Women's Association), the strongest organisation in the Federation of German Women's Associations, where she gave a speech on Agricultural Housewives' Associations⁵⁶. These actions implemented Elisabeth Boehm's concept that she presented to agrarians in Wiesbaden in 1913. The concept, backed by Conrad von Wangenheim, assumed giving the bourgeois women's movement such an image and programme that would reflect the interests of the conservative countryside.

CONCLUSIONS

In the existing literature on Agricultural Housewives' Associations the wider transformation of this organization that happened between 1912 and 1914 has not been discussed so far. From the perspective of defensive

⁵⁴ Archiwum Państwowe w Szczecinie, Rolnicze stowarzyszenia na Pomorzu Zachodnim w Szczecinie, sygn. 159, s. 285–287.

⁵⁵ GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 87 B, Nr. 20609, s. 9; G.B., *Landwirtschaftliche Hausfrauenvereine in Pommern*, „Unser Pommerland“ 1913–1914, 6–7, s. 261.

⁵⁶ *Gruppentagung des Allgemeinen deutschen Frauenvereins*, „Stettiner Hausfrau. Pommersche Wochenschrift für Hauswirtschaft und Mode, Handarbeit und Unterhaltung“ 10 May 1914, 67.

modernization, it meant using the programme of moderate emancipation of women propagated by Elisabet Boehm to strengthen the influence of conservative agrarians following the electoral defeat of the German Conservative Party in 1912 and face the effects of industrialization, that is, propaganda of social democrats among agricultural workers and outflow of people to the cities. Initially, new fields of activities for women in rural areas propagated by Agricultural Housewives' Associations created a vision of women becoming independent and autonomous in a specific sphere of action; a reference to the programme of moderate bourgeois women's movement was clear. In those circumstances they could not count on agrarians' support, without which, on the other hand, they did not have access to professional knowledge about agriculture. Such attitude was represented by among others Pomeranian nobility who approached modernized agricultural enterprises with a distance. It was only the hedging of agrarian women's movement in a new patriotic and conservative narrative that allowed to notice a way to strengthen the position of noble manors in the countryside and even rebuild old patriarchal relationships in modernisation of women-led households and cross-class nature of associations. The support of the monarchy for associations and a manifestation of women's attachment to tradition through establishing branches of the Union of Conservative Women in rural areas launched the process of adding new elements to the concept of nobility. That process was stopped by the war that accelerated the redefinition of women's role in rural areas.

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