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FEMINA OECONOMICA.
FIGHTING AGAINST LANDFLUCHT
IN THE PROGRAM OF AGRARIAN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT
IN PRUSSIA BEFORE THE OUTBREAK OF WORLD WAR I

Abstract: In February 1914, the Agricultural Associations of Housewives, operating in the Eastern provinces of Prussia since the 1890s, were subordinated to organisations responsible for the development of agriculture in Prussia, which were dominated by conservatives and noble landowners. This came about on the initiative of some influential agrarians, who, in this way, wanted to strengthen their influence in rural areas, as well as to include the women's agrarian movement in combating the outflow of labour from agriculture. The women's organizations, having been politicized in this way and adopted by agrarian leaders after 1908, were to implement a new strategy for preventing the migration of rural population to cities. This is as a result of the partial support for Heinrich Sohnrey's programme and his concept of improving the quality of life in rural areas. Elisabet Boehm, the founder of the associations, from the very beginning of their existence, sought to cooperate with agricultural organizations. She believed that this would be the only way for members to gain access to the expertise for implementing the main point of the association's agenda, i.e. the professionalization of women's work in rural areas. The article focuses on explaining the circumstances that led to the interest of the agrarians in the women's agrarian movement and its inclusion in the reform programme for rural prosperity launched just before the war and showing that the cooperation was primarily aimed at using the associations to strengthen their influence in rural areas.

Keywords: *Prussia, 20th century, Landflucht, social reforms, agrarian women's movement.*

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INTRODUCTION

In previous studies on the outflow of agricultural workers from the Eastern agrarian provinces of the Prussian state at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (*Landflucht*), several issues have been discussed. These were mainly: the directions and intensity of the migration of rural population, the situation of peasants and seasonal workers as well as the actions of the authorities and landowners to prevent labour shortages in rural areas. The latter issue was discussed, mainly, in the context of the so-called internal colonization and repressive legislation against workers who broke off contacts and abandoned work in rural estates [Stępiński W. 1995: 70–91; Szudra D. 2005: 39–45; Wajda K. 1968a: 573–588, 1968b: 24–40, 1969; Drewniak B. 1966; Roller K. 1994; Brożek A. 1989; Chojecki D. K., 2019: 83–122]. German historian Georg Stöcker added another issue to the list. Examining the activities of Heinrich Sohnrey and the functioning of the *Deutscher Verein für ländliche Wohlfahrts- und Heimatpflege* – the German Association for Rural Welfare and Homeland Maintenance (established in 1896 on his initiative, but also with great support from the Prussian *Landwirtschaftsministerium* – the German Ministry of Agriculture), pointed out that in the run-up to World War I it was no longer legislation but social reforms and measures to improve living conditions in the countryside that were supposed to prevent farm workers from migrating to cities. This issue was one of the elements in the discussion on the place of rural economy in the politics of a state undergoing industrialization. It also inspired the scientific interest in the situation of male workers (e.g. Count Theodore von der Goltz's, Max Sering's and Max Weber's surveys and analyses) and female workers from rural areas [Roller K. 1994]. It was also connected with the welfare policy (German: *Wohlfahrtspolitik*) introduced in the Wilhelm Reich since the end of the 19th century. This policy was primarily an educational and upbringing project, which aimed, among other things, to disseminate knowledge among workers in the field of hygiene, health as well as proper functioning of the household, including the upbringing and education of children. These activities were supported by a number of associations, including religious ones, which created organisational solutions to develop this form of self-help. Although they were connected with the transformation of Germany into a modern welfare state, they were likewise accompanied by a broader context connected with the assumptions of the national economy and the debate on the economic value of man [Vögele J., W. Woelk W. 2002: 123–9].

RESEARCH CONTEXTS AND OBJECTIVES

As Georg Stöcker points out, the programme of social reforms in rural areas was formulated at the end of the 19th century and was supported by the Prussian Ministry of Agriculture just before the end of the century. Agrarian, conservative elites from the Eastern provinces of the Prussian state (especially from the provinces of East Prussia, West Prussia, Pomerania, Brandenburg) did not support it until around 1908. At that time, at least, some of the landowners finally found out that the restrictive legislation would not be able to prevent the depopulation of rural areas, and that relying on the work of nationally foreign seasonal workers would not bring the expected results. The essence of the new approach to countering Landflucht was to value the agrarian world and design actions aimed at building emotional bonds between rural inhabitants and their birthplace, alleviating antagonism between landowners and small peasants as well as workers and to improve the quality of life in the countryside. The aim was not only to eliminate the causes of poverty, but, above all, to raise the standard of living in such a way that it did not differ so drastically from what a modern industrial city offered. Sohnrey himself was an opponent of cities as a form of collective life organisation. He believed that they accumulated all the negative effects of the progress of civilization, including the eradication of morals [Stöcker G. 2011: 57-68]. The vision of a better and prosperous life in the rural areas and, as Max Weber puts it, the possibility of “climbing into the peasantry” was to prevent the so-called free labourers (German: freie Arbeiter), bailiffs (German: Insten) and homeworkers (German: Häusler) from moving to the cities. It was from among these groups that hired day-labourers (German: Tagelöhner), working in landed estates or for rich peasants, were recruited. Limiting migration to cities would, as it was believed, result in a lower demand for Polish seasonal workers from the territories annexed by Russia and Galicia, which, due to the growing nationalist moods, was to be of key importance for the defence of German interests in the East. It was also hoped that in this way, German settlers would be attracted to the East Prussian village within the framework of the so-called internal colonization (German: innere Kolonisation) [Stöcker G. 2011: 90-4, 106, 120-21; Vonderach G. 2015: 36-8].¹

¹ For a more detailed description of the different rural population groups see.: Szurgacz H. 2014: 68-71. Cf. Kizik E., 2015: 46-47, 57-68].

The issues raised are still among the less studied problems of rural economy in the eastern provinces of the Prussian state. One of the gaps is the participation in the Agricultural Housewives' Associations (Landwirtschaftlicher Hausfrauenverein) welfare building program in Prussia, which was established in the late 19th century and developed in the following century, reaching its greatest prosperity in the times of the Weimar Republic [see: Jones E.B. 2009; Bridenthal R. 1984: 153-73; Bridenthal R. 1993: 375-405]. Their activity in the period before World War I was already the subject of research, however, initially in the context of connections with the bourgeois women's movement as well as with the German Conservative Party (German: Deutschkonservative Partei) and Prussian organisations influencing the agricultural economy [Schwarz Ch., Natzmer F. von 1998: 31-96; Schwarz Ch. 1990; Sawahn A. 2009]. The findings, so far, have shown that the women's agrarian movement was not autonomous and it developed, thanks to the support of parts of the East Prussian agrarians headed by the influential Conrad von Wangenheim. On his initiative, in February 1914, the Agricultural Housewives Associations were subordinated to the Prussian Board of Agriculture (German: Königlich-Preußisches Landesökonomiekollegium), which had the status of an advisory body to the Prussian Ministry of Agriculture, and then they became incorporated into the structures of the Chamber of Agriculture (German: Landwirtschaftskammer) operating in individual provinces of the state. In this way, the associations were politicized, as they took on the character of female annexes to these institutions, which was part of the pattern of mobilization of women characteristic of conservative and patriotic-nationalist circles in Wilhelm Germany [Süchting-Hänger A. 2002: 67-70].

The level of cooperation was to be based, primarily, on the concept of professionalization and, therefore, also on the productivity of rural women regardless of their social affiliation as formulated by the women's agrarian movement. Its implementation, however, required access to agronomic expertise, which was at the disposal of agrarians affiliated to agricultural organisations. Initially, however, they distanced themselves from cooperating with women, especially as some of the activists cooperated with the moderate bourgeois women's movement. The aim of the article is to demonstrate that the above-mentioned integration of Agricultural Housewives Associations with organisations responsible for agricultural policy in Prussia was possible only when some influential agrarians saw them as a tool for combating the outflow of labour from rural areas within the framework of the programme for improving living conditions in ru-

ral areas. This was reflected in the fact that at the beginning of 1914, the statutes of the associations were supplemented with a provision on their involvement in the fight against Landflucht. Benefits resulting from the productivity of women under the agrarian control, bearing in mind their interests, meant that women were allowed to feminise certain branches of production in rural areas and build a female autonomous field of activity.

The research is based on archival materials regarding cooperation of Agricultural Housewife Associations with the Ministry of Agriculture and agrarian organizations, speeches by Elisabet Boehm, the founder of the associations, as well as articles published in the bi-weekly "Die Gutsfrau. Halbmonatschrift für die gebildeten Frauen auf dem Lande", which have been published since 1912 and associated with the agrarian women's movement [Sawahn A. 2009: 80].

THE AGRARIAN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN PRUSSIA AND THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF WOMEN'S WORK IN RURAL AREAS

The first Agricultural Housewives' Association was founded in 1898 in Rastenburg (nowadays Kętrzyn), East Prussia. It initiated the development of the agrarian women's movement, which has gradually increased its reach to all of Prussia, and subsequently the whole of Germany after 1918, thus, becoming one of the largest women's organizations in the Weimar Republic. The expansion of its structures in the early part of the 20th century was slow and did not herald the later successes, which began during the years of the First World War. Elisabet Boehm of Lamgarben (now Garbno), the originator and leader of the movement, as well as the initiator of the network of associations in the various provinces of Prussia, had to struggle with a number of difficulties. These difficulties were related to the prejudices of the women themselves against the forms of their activity propagated by the associations. Also, the East Prussian agrarians were negative towards the Agricultural Housewives' Associations, because they proclaimed the necessity for women's involvement in some sectors of rural economy, which they considered to be solely the domain of men. The main idea around which the program of associations founded on the models of the organization operating in Rastenburg was built, was to enhance the value of women's activities in rural households. E. Boehm believed that they should be regarded as work that could boost the fami-

ly's income. This, however, required professional preparation, which, by the way, was necessitated by scientific and technical progress at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Domestic work, elevated to the rank of a profession, opened the way to employing women in other households as qualified housewives [Boehm E. 1941: 16-24].

The professionalisation of female occupations in a rural household was also linked to the monetisation of the effects of women's work. Food and other products produced by housewives were therefore no longer just for the needs of the family. All surpluses were sold in towns, at associations' outlets (Verkaufsstellen).² The productivity of women was also associated with the extension of their tasks in a rural household. E. Boehm promoted and successfully implemented the inclusion of vegetable farming, fruit farming, beekeeping, and especially poultry breeding based on scientific foundations, into the scope of women's duties. The exceptional character of the Agricultural Housewives' Associations was also evident in other fields. The new vision of women's tasks in rural areas concerned both wives of landowners and women from peasant families and farm workers. In the associations, they were to cooperate across social divisions and, what is more, to invite women from middle and higher social strata of cities to cooperate [Schwarz Ch., Natzmer F. von 1988: 31-2]. The task of the latter was to run sales points of goods produced in rural areas in cities, which was connected with the necessity of their further education in the field of agricultural production. In this way, the founder wanted to overcome the antagonism between the city and the countryside and build understanding and respect for the work of rural women. According to E. Boehm, this concept proved its worth, which was to be confirmed by the social structure of the members. According to the data quoted by her, in 1911 in East Prussia, there were about 1,200 women living in towns and 1,200 women living in rural areas, half of whom were to be associated with large landownership and half with the peasant status. Although, these figures may give rise to justified doubts, they nevertheless reflect a certain tendency that also confirmed by later statistics [Boehm-Lamgarben E. 1912b: 243; Sawahn A. 2009: 70].

The model of women's activity promoted by E. Boehm meant a new conceptualization of the role of rural women, which apart from the traditional care of the family (*femina domestica*), and in the case of peasant women and female workers, the obligation to participate in field work, includ-

² On the organisation and functioning of outlets see: Schwarz Ch. [1991:19-22].

ed also economic, rationalised and profit-oriented activity requiring the use of the *homo oeconomicus* logic. Thus, in this way, a model of a farming woman guided by market rationality, autonomous in the areas of rural economy taken over by her and linked by partnerships with men managing other areas of agricultural production was formed. However, the realization of the *femina oeconomica*³ concept required additional education and access to expertise in agronomy and breeding, which at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries modernized agricultural production. In practice, this meant the necessity of cooperation with landowners gathered in agricultural associations that were engaged in the promotion of modern forms of farming, as well as Agricultural Chambers supporting scientific and technical progress in rural areas operating in particular provinces and, since the end of the 19th century, setting up itinerant household schools for girls from peasant families and agricultural workers [see: Steinbeck N. 1997: 217–227; Frick I. 1913: 50–51]. This approach was also part of the process of mobilizing the entire society to work for the state, which was visible in imperial Germany. It was also an attempt to mitigate the antagonism visible in Prussia between the city and the countryside, which was the result of the rivalry between the agrarian world of the past and modernity, whose symbol became an industrial city.

Professionalisation of women's tasks in the household was not an original idea of E. Boehm. Already in the 1870s, the first associations of this type of activity were established. However, they were addressed to the representatives of the bourgeoisie and did not have such a social and economic program as the Agricultural Housewives' Association. However, they pointed to the growing importance of rationalised household management for the identity of middle and upper class women. Expert preparation in this field became also one of the slogans of the moderate bourgeois women's movement, whose activists wanted to expand the possibilities of women's professional work. What is more, at the beginning of the 20th century, proper preparation for domestic duties was also interpreted as a patriotic duty of women. It became a guarantee for the proper functioning of families that enabled them to provide the state with healthy and full-fledged recruits. From the point of view of the interests of a militarised state, this was par-

³ This concept functions in the feminist economy, but in this case it does not refer to its theoretical background, but only to constitutive features determining the motivation for economic activity of women [see: Krzyżanowska N. 2013: 185–90; Rogowska B. 2018: 201–209].

ticularly important, as was the inclusion of women in the process of food production. Some activists also popularised the view that annual training in a household school should be a compulsory element in the education of girls – so called women’s year of service (German: Frauendienstjahr), comparable to an annual military service for men [Sawahn A. 2009: 59, 252]. Such a postulate was formed by Ida von Kortzfleisch, founder of rural household schools affiliated in the so-called Reifensteiner Association (German: Reifensteiner Verband). She started her work for the professionalization of the rural household at the same time and independently of E. Boehm. Despite the initial difficulties, the two activists started to work together in the early years of the 20th century. The founder of the agrarian women’s movement sought cooperation with I. von Kortzfleisch, counting on her help with setting up a farmstead school for girls, which would act as an institution of the Agricultural Housewives’ Associations. She managed to implement this plan. The school, named Kronprinzessin-Cecilien Schule, was founded near Königsberg (now Kaliningrad) in East Prussia in 1912 [Schwarz Ch. 1991: 33-7]. At that time, the associations had already formed an extensive network extending far beyond East Prussia. From the beginning of the 20th century, they were established in West Prussia, in the provinces of Pomerania, Poznań and Brandenburg, as well as Silesia and Schleswig-Holstein. Like other women’s organisations, they merged into associations. The first one was the Agricultural Housewives’ Association of East Prussia (Ostpreussischer Verband der Landwirtschaftlichen Hausfrauenvereine), founded at the turn of 1904 and 1905, which included 14 associations with 860 members. Others were established in the provinces: West Prussia, Pomerania and Schleswig-Holstein with a total of 59 organisations. In February of 1914, they merged into the national Prussian Federation of Agricultural Housewives’ Associations (German: Preußischer Landesverband Landwirtschaftlicher Hausfrauenvereine), headed by E. Boehm. The statute adopted at that time, apart from educating women in professional household management and running sales points of agricultural products in towns, also mentioned a new additional point, i.e. preventing the outflow of people from rural areas [GStA PK⁴, I. HA Rep. 87 B, Nr. 20546: 28, 31; Sawahn A. 2009: 67].

⁴ Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz Berlin-Dahlem, I. HA Rep. 87 B, Nr. 20546 (hereinafter: GStA PK).

OUTFLOW OF WOMEN FROM THE COUNTRYSIDE – SEARCHING FOR CAUSES AND REMEDIES

The lack of young women in rural areas at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries was increasingly acute and was one of the subjects discussed during the debates of provincial Agricultural Chambers, including Stettin (now Szczecin) [Buchsteiner I. 1996: 75; Stępiński W. 1995: 90]. The shortage of labour in agriculture did not concern only women. It was an important problem in the eastern provinces of Prussia. It resulted from migration of people from lower social strata of the rural population who did not benefit from agrarian reforms, to cities. The processes of industrialization and urbanization created an opportunity for a higher status. Studies to date show that at the end of the century, there were mainly female servants from landed estates and peasant farms, looking for work in the cities as maids, who moved from rural areas in the eastern part of the country to the cities. After 1907, there were also rural female workers⁵ among the migrant women hoping to find better paid employment in industry [Knapp U. 1984: 7-8; Drewniak B. 1966: 64-5]. According to Brigitte Kerchner and Kathrin Roller, this *exodus* was a manifestation of their rebellion against the difficult working conditions and patriarchal character of the service, as well as an expression of their aspiration for independence, greater social security and social prestige. Migrations were, therefore, a form of grassroots agrarian protest expressed by a passive refusal to work and to leave the countryside [Kerchner B. 1992: 237; Roller K. 1994: 134-7]. Hence, there was a shortage of women in rural areas for ancillary and servant work, as well as seasonal work, such as reaping or potato harvest. This issue did not only have an economic dimension, but a demographic and national one as well. Migrations of women from rural areas contributed to a decline in birth rate and this made it attractive for seasonal workers coming from, among others, Polish lands, to get married in the eastern provinces of Prussia. This meant mixed marriages, which aroused fears of polonization of villages and the spread of Catholicism [Roller K. 1994: 132-33; *Ergebnisse...1914*: 189].

The outflow of female labour to cities was such an important problem that it also became the subject of a survey conducted by the Standing

⁵ The category of rural female workers included: contract workers, free day workers, servant girls in the manor, nomadic workers and girls and young women from small peasant farms [see: *Ergebnisse...1914*: 189].

Committee on Improving the Interests of Women Workers (German: Ständiger Ausschuß zur Förderung der Arbeiterinnen-Interessen), established in 1906. It was created by women activists connected with circles of social reformers and was headed by Margarete Friedenthal [Wörner-Heil O. 2010: 292-300]. The first results of the research were presented as early as 1912. They showed that in the eastern provinces of Prussia, the reason for the migration of young women from rural areas was, primarily, due to the low prestige of work in agriculture, which meant that the actions so far taken to retain women in rural areas had not touched the essence of the problem [Putlitz F. E. zu 1912: 87-8]. This was also confirmed by the poor results of the social programme implemented since the turn of the century by the Ministry of Agriculture and Agricultural Chambers. It was based mainly on establishing various forms of education for girls and women from peasant families and farm workers. It was assumed that appropriate education would prepare them for work and encourage them to stay in the countryside [Buchsteiner I. 1996: 73]. As indicated by the voices from the Chamber of Agriculture of West Prussia, these schools and itinerant winter courses acquainted rural residents with the principles of household management, but did not teach occupations related to rural life. As a result, young women, after gaining qualifications to run a household, were even more eager to go to the cities to join the services there [Zum Unterricht...1914: 140 -41].

In the face of these failures, the new concept of rural women offered by the Farm Housewives' Associations seemed to be the right solution for agrarists seeking for new solutions in the fight against Landflucht. The peasant woman as a *femina oeconomica* became, either a producer of cash-flow food in urban sales outlets or a professional workforce employed outside the home, in gardening, vegetable production or poultry breeding. Thus, she contributed to the increase in the family's income or built the economic foundations for its future. She was properly educated and therefore prepared for her duties and could cooperate, in this respect, with representatives of rural elites. As E.Boehm noticed in the summer of 1914, the project of joint physical work of women high-born and those from the lowest social strata, built around identical tasks in the household, was supposed to enhance low-rated work in the countryside and to be a source of splendour and pride for female peasants and workers [Boehm--Haus Lamgarben E. 1914: 341-2]. However, it required the support of landowners and members of agricultural organizations, who had to see the Agricultural Housewives' Associations as a politically attractive partner.

AGRARIANS – THE WAY TO COOPERATION

The establishment, at the beginning of 1914, of the Prussian Union of Agricultural Housewives' Associations could, seemingly, be seen as a sign of the strengthening of the agrarian women's movement. However, the associations were not yet numerous enough to create supra-provincial structures of which the founder was also aware [*Ueber die Gründung...*1914: 215]. They also had no wide support, neither among women, nor among landowners. They were too conservative for activists operating in cities and too innovative for women in rural areas. The owners of estates, on the other hand, were reluctant to accept the attempts of women to join the agricultural economy. Apart from East and West Prussia, associations were formed with difficulty and had only recently gained acceptance of some conservative-agrarian elites from the eastern provinces of the state in 1912. The consolidation of the agrarian women's movement was, therefore, primarily the result of the efforts of agrarianists gathered around the influential Conrad von Wangenheim, chairman of the Agrarian League (German: Bund der Landwirte) and a member of the board of the Chamber of Agriculture in Pomerania, as well as the policy of the German-Conservative Party [Wangenheim F. H. von 1934: 351-69; Koeller H. W. von 1999: 46-8; Buchsteiner I. 1996: 69-70]. As mentioned above, this led to the subordination of the associations to central agricultural organisations and, indirectly, to the state. However, this was only possible when the events of 1912 led the agrarians to see the multidimensional benefits of cooperation with women.

The first was the failure of the German-Conservative Party to represent their interests in the Reichstag elections in January of 1912. [Retallack J. N. 1988: 179-90]. The universal character of voting (in contrast to the census electoral law for the Prussian Landtag) resulted in the fact that part of the rural population supported social democratic candidates, which meant the loss of political influence in rural areas of eastern Prussia that were considered to be a German-conservative bastion. In these circumstance, the concept of transforming the party from an elitist into a mass party was developed. It, however, required tools that would allow for the possibility of rebuilding one's influence there, including influencing the women. In the literature on the subject so far, however, attention is drawn primarily to the contacts between conservative-agrarians and the German Evangelical Women's League (German: Deutsch-Evangelischer Frauenbund) [Heinsohn K. 2010: 30-4]. In addition to this organization, however, they were

also interested in the Agricultural Housewives' Associations, which appeared to be an excellent tool for strengthening the influence of peasants' and rural workers' families. The programme of the agrarian women's movement created an opportunity for building special relations between the local elite leaders of the associations and the rural women. The chairwomen were to be their mentors, showing their own example of how to modernise the household and professionally carry out rural women's activities. Conservative agrarians considered this cooperation as one of the ways to rebuild the old patriarchal relations between the manor and the countryside in a new and uncontroversial form. They also noted that by influencing the upbringing of the next generation through women, they can strengthen their desired image of the world and social relations among the rural population.

The E. Boehm associations would not have been noticed by the conservatives if it had not been for their current disrespectful attitude towards women's organisations. The exhibition, held in Berlin from 24 February to 27 March 1912, entitled "Women at home and at work" (German: *Die Frau in Haus und Beruf*) contributed significantly to this. It was organised by the Federation of German Women's Associations (German: *Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine*), the main association of the bourgeoisie women's movement. The exhibition was accompanied by a women's congress lasting several days at the turn of February and March [Heinsohn K. 2010: 26-32; Süchting-Hänger A. 2002: 82-4]. These events, however, were not an opportunity for women activists to claim their gender rights, even though the difficult situation of women working in both the lowest and upper social strata was discussed during the congress. The main aim of these events was to present the achievements of the movement in the field of women's education and professional activity and to make society aware of the many useful results it brings. The substantive and factual sessions illustrated by the exhibition were also to showcase the bourgeois women's movement as a reliable partner for cooperation in various social and educational undertakings. This opportunity was used by the Agricultural Housewives' Association who presented their achievements in a special pavilion, while E. Boehm discussed their character on the third day of the congress, drawing attention primarily to the contribution of women to the growth of income from agriculture and emphasizing the need to educate girls in this field [Boehm-Lamgarben E. 1912a: 88-100].

The exhibition was widely publicised in the press, not just in the local ones, thereby intriguing the politicians so much that they referred

to it during the February session of the Reichstag [*Verhandlungen des Reichstages...* 1912: 339].⁶ Agricultural Housewives' Associations aroused interests, mainly, due to their innovative, supra-state, rural-urban character and vision of women's productivity in rural areas. This program, although known in the eastern provinces of Prussia, aroused great interests in Berlin, not only among female activists, but also among members of the central agricultural organizations. It was significant because E. Boehm had been striving for it for years. Even before the opening of the exhibition, on 20 February 1912, she delivered a speech to the members of the German Agricultural Association (German: Deutschen Landwirtschafts-Gesellschaft) promoting progress in rural areas. From the discussion that followed, it was clear that the representatives of the rural elite, present at the meeting, were primarily interested in the concept of *femina oeconomica*. Women's empowerment was supposed to lead to an increase in the profitability of agricultural production, and by intensifying the activities of associations it was supposed to contribute to limiting the import of certain rural products [Boehm-Lamgarben E. 1912b: 241-59]. The growing income from the sale of products manufactured by women was the crowning argument here. In East Prussia alone, the turnover of the 18 sales points operating there in 1908 amounted to 482 000 marks. By 1913 there were already 35 such outlets and, thus, increasing their turnover to 1 004 000 marks [Schwarz Ch. 1990: 93]. Some agrarians saw other benefits in this concept as well. Such benefits were connected with the inclusion of women in the welfare policy in rural areas. Its assumptions were based on the conviction that an increase in family income would improve their living conditions, which in turn would limit migration of rural population to cities. In this way, a group of landowners, who, after 1908, partially supported the programme of the German Association for Rural Prosperity as a new approach to the fight against Landflucht, began to recognize the importance of the agrarian women's movement.

All the contexts indicated above converged in the views of Conrad von Wangenheim. This conservative agrarian, active in central agricultural organisations, was also one of the moderate supporters of H. Sohnrey's reforms. He understood that in the new industrial world, landowners, in order to strengthen their influence, had to seek agreement both with the world of large industry and with other social strata of the rural popula-

⁶ The report from the exhibition was also published, among others, in the Polish Formist magazine "Ster" in issue 6 of 1912.

tion, who also combined their *modus vivendi* with agriculture [Rede des Freiherrn... 1934: 75; Deutsche Tageszeitung... 1934: 88]. For him as a „nationalist propagandist“, welfare policy in rural areas also had a patriotic-national dimension. It led to the economic strengthening of German peasants and, if not eliminated, then at least reduced the demand for seasonal workers coming from, among others, the Kingdom of Poland and Galicia [Stöcker G. 2011: 121].

ELISABET BOEHM – AGREEMENT IN THE SHADOW OF RENUNCIATION

For E. Boehm, who for years aimed at establishing cooperation with agricultural organisations, the interest of agrarians' gathered around Conrad von Wangenheim in the Agricultural Housewives' Associations after the women's exhibition and congress in 1912 was her crowning achievement. Finalizing it, however, meant breaking the cooperation with the bourgeois women's movement. From the beginning of its activity, she strived to include her associations in the structures of the German Union of Women's Associations. She treated contacts with activists and participation in their congresses as a form of further education in the field of social work and activities related to the professionalization of women's activities in the household, as well as a source of inspiration in the search for various ways of activating women.⁷ However, this was opposed by some conservative activists from East Prussia, who were gathered around Toni, the Countess Bülow von Dennewitz's. They believed that the associations were to carry out only economic activities, without any social program and cooperation with the bourgeois women's movement [Schwarz Ch. 1990: 65-8; Sawahn A. 2009: 93-4; Kerchner B. 1992: 232-3]. E. Boehm was convinced, however, that it was possible to combine cooperation with agricultural organisations (providing access to professional knowledge) and the German Union of Women's Associations, especially, since in the last few years before World War I, it did not put radical, feminist demands first. This view, however, did not win her supporters from among the conservative agrarians, who in the early years of the 20th century distanced themselves from

⁷ Contacts with the bourgeois women's movement E. Boehm also had through her husband's sister Hanna Bieber-Boehm, who was one of the most significant activists of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries [Schwarz Ch. 1990: 41-2].

her activities fearing the politicisation of rural women [Schwarz Ch. 1990: 37-8; Kerchner B. 1992: 233]. This issue returned in 1912/1913, when the circumstances of including associations in the structures of agricultural organizations were agreed upon. Although Conrad von Wangenheim did not strongly oppose E. Boehm's relations with the bourgeois women's movement, in June 1913, during the XXXIII Conference of Boards of the Prussian Chambers of Agriculture in Wiesbaden, she was unequivocally asked to suspend any contacts with the German Union of Women's Associations. It was decided, then, that as soon as possible the network of associations would be expanded, and they would, in the individual provinces, merge into associations under the authority of the Chambers of Agriculture. These, further on, would be merged into a national association to be supervised by the Royal Prussian National College of Economics [GStA PK: 7-14]. As mentioned earlier, these provisions were implemented in February 1914 [GStA PK: 28-31].

RE-INTERPRETATION OF THE PROGRAM OF THE AGRARIAN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

The Agricultural Housewives' Associations, functioning within the structures of agricultural organisations, were to implement the existing programme covering: education of women from higher social strata in rural areas in the field of rural households, further education of women from peasant families and families of agricultural workers in this field, awakening their interest in food production, running sales outlets for rural products and including female town dwellers in the activities of the associations. Although they were related to the empowerment of women, they were understood primarily as measures to build prosperity in rural areas, i.e. to prevent the outflow of people to cities. E. Boehm herself agreed with this interpretation of the programme after she became acquainted with the agrarian views on the subject at the turn of 1912 and 1913. Although she had already been in contact with the supporters of the Sohnrey's programme, the women's agrarian movement did not yet have the achievements to inspire them to cooperate. In 1903 Hugo Thiel, a senior official in the Ministry of Agriculture and at the same time the chairman of the German Association for Welfare in the Countryside, fascinated by associations as a platform for cooperation between women from cities and villages, encouraged her to inculcate them also in other provinces of Prussia

[Schwarz Ch. 1990: 50; Wörner-Heil O. 1997: 26]. Adolf von Batocki, head of the Agricultural Chamber of East Prussia, was also very involved in the policy for prosperity in the countryside, but E. Boehm's contacts with the bourgeois women's movement distanced him from closer cooperation. Nevertheless, as the head of the Agricultural Chamber in Królewiec he agreed, in 1909, to include female activists in the department dealing with poultry breeding, so that women could gain expertise in this field [Maass L. 1912: 414].

The outbreak of war made it impossible to develop the activity of the Agricultural Housewives' Associations as organizations that were supposed to prevent the outflow of people, especially women, from rural areas. Nevertheless, theoretical considerations on this subject were formulated as early as 1912. In May, the German Association for Rural Welfare published a magazine entitled „Archiv für Innere Kolonisation“, where women from land estates were shown occupations designed to influence the productivity of women in rural areas. These included fruit and vegetables processing, small-scale livestock farming, and cottage industry production of various products useful in the household. These works were to combine traditional methods and modern techniques resulting from the progress of civilization. It was also recommended that they should be disseminated in cooperation with women from small peasant households and workers' homesteads, including those established as part of the colonization campaign [Maass L. 1912: 415-6].

These issues were also addressed in the „Die Gutsfrau“ magazine, which is associated with the agrarian women's movement. E. Boehm also published on its pages, commenting on the tasks of the wives of landowners in solving the problem of the lack of young women in the countryside. She believed that proper education of women was the key. However, she saw this issue more broadly, i.e. as part of a plan to improve social relations in rural areas, to ease tensions between landowners and farm workers and to bring about their harmonious cooperation within the framework of specific duties. By pointing out the importance of women's work in rural areas for the state and city dwellers, she also tried to build the prestige of agricultural activities, thus referring to the results of the research on the outflow of female labour from rural to urban areas. She also recognised the need to regulate the rules and working hours of women in rural areas, as was the case in the cities, but any attempts to discuss this issue resulted in resistance from conservative rural communities [Kerchner B. 1992: 239-240]. It seems that in interpreting the activity of the agrarian

women's movement as a fight against Landflucht, she also saw an opportunity to extend the program of her associations to include social issues that played an important role in the concept of building prosperity in rural areas, e.g. counteracting alcoholism, child care, or improving health care. As mentioned above, some female activists opposed this type of activity, believing that it would bring the association closer to the bourgeois women's movement. However, after establishing cooperation with agricultural organisations, E. Boehm could officially return to her plans and, under the banner of welfare policy, act to solve the so-called social issue in rural areas.

CONCLUSIONS

The inclusion of the Agricultural Housewives' Associations in the fight against Landflucht was a result of the crisis in the milieu of the East Prussian agrarian community connected with losing the support of the German Conservative Party. The search for new solutions to help them consolidate their influence in rural areas determined the interest in the agrarian women's movement, the founder of which had been striving for years to cooperate with agricultural organisations dominated by them. Counteracting the outflow of the population, especially women from rural areas, did not mean, however, that the associations would undertake any additional activities. It was only connected with the re-interpretation of their programme. Until now, the centre of the programme has been to professionalise work in a rural household and to generate additional income resulting from women taking over certain agricultural production and breeding sectors within the framework of cooperation between representatives of all social strata living in rural areas and city dwellers. In 1912, this innovative formula was promoted during the exhibition "Women at home and at work" and aroused great interests through its potential for interpretation. Conrad von Wangenheim, representing the agrarian community interested in working with E. Boehm, saw the associations as a tool for increasing the profitability of land estates, consolidating the conservative world view in rural areas, and improving the living conditions of the families of small peasants and workers. All these elements were included in the formula of the fight against Landflucht. The activity of the associations, whose starting point was the construction of *femina oeconomica*, was connected with the income earned by women. This income was condi-

tioned by appropriate knowledge, and the women from land estates were to pass it on to the women from lower social strata. This situation created hopes for building special relations of subordination and world-view unity. Additional income in the long term meant an improvement in living conditions in rural areas, which in turn were to have an impact on limiting the migration of the rural population to cities. Recognition of all these contexts by some agrarians made the Agricultural Housewives' Associations an attractive partner for cooperation, especially since a number of conservative and nationalist organisations had already been supporting themselves with the work of women. However, the support of agrarians, visible from around mid-1912, forced E. Boehm to give up on cooperation with the bourgeois women's movement, which ultimately had the effect of stabilising the identity of the movement, which, according to the founder's concept, was not supposed to have a conservative face. This issue is so important because during the First World War, and especially after its end, associations strengthened their importance and played a major role in the integration of the rural proletariat with the agricultural economy within the framework of the Weimar Republic's continued policy of prosperity. Therefore, they maintained the continuity of activity, the principles of which were laid down at the beginning of 1914, which is not emphasized by research on the agrarian movement of women, as well as the circumstances of its politicization.

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