

*Heroic Journeys? Networks of women scientists in the late nineteenth and twentieth century.* Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Science and Arts; Research Group Cultural History since 1750, KU Leuven, 16.06.2015.

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On June 16th, the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Science and Arts and the Research Group Cultural History since 1750 of KU Leuven organized a one-day conference on women scientists, their networks, travels and scientific persona. This conference was the result of the meeting of two ongoing research projects. The first research project, entitled *Scientific Personae in Cultural Encounters (SPICE)*, is a cooperation between the universities of Stockholm, Groningen and Leuven. SPICE seeks to investigate the construction of scientific personae in the twentieth century. It focuses on the practice of scientific travel as a moment of cultural encounters that facilitate the adaptation and creation of new ways of being a scientist.

The second research project, the Belgian Science and Technology Online Resources (Bestor), is embedded in the Royal Flemish Academy. In the first lecture of the day LYVIA DISER and GEERT VANPAEMEL (Brussels) introduced Bestor as an online repository of Belgian scientists. Diser showed how fruitful this database can be for the research of networks, especially networks of the hitherto often neglected female scientists. The (hyper)links between scientists not only lay bare institutional and scientific networks, but also more informal networks, that sometimes existed outside the scientific field and were often personal.

MARIA RENTETZI (Athens) delivered a keynote lecture that gave a framework for the other papers of the day by delving further into the role and nature of scientific networks. She stressed that networks could take on both epistemological and social forms; they could thus serve the spread of knowledge as well as the furthering of careers and often did both at the same time. Especially in the formal, institutionalized and specific networks, the role of men was decisive and women were marginalized. Informal, personal, non-specific networks allow for better study of the role of women as Rentetzi illustrated by the special case of Queen Frederica of Greece, whose network on nuclear power dissolved after her exile in 1967.

One institutional network that returned throughout many contributions was the International Federation of University Women (IFUW). The IFUW was the explicit topic in the paper by MARIE-ELISE HUNYADI (Geneva), who discussed the career trajectories of some of its prominent members. She showed how this network of academically educated women could serve as stepping stone towards a political career. In the paper by KAAAT WILS and PIETER HUISTRA (Leuven) the Belgian branch of the IFUW was studied alongside with the Belgian American Educational Foundation (BAEF); both served as funding agencies for travelling women scientists. Whereas the BAEF actively promoted a scientific persona of an 'am-

bassador-scientist', the Belgian federation of university women did not propose its own ideal type of the female scientist. In both organizations, gender remained strikingly absent; a silence that was reflected in the seriousness of the travel reports written by the grantees to their funders.

Four of the papers took a biographical approach. KIRSTI NISKANEN (Stockholm) sketched the career of the prominent Swedish economist Karin Kock (1891-1976). Although Kock's network spread out widely, from the London School of Economics to the IFUW, she did not embody the right persona to enter into Swedish academia. Her approach to economics was deemed too little theoretical by her peers and that forced Karin Kock into an otherwise very successful career in the Swedish administration. From neighboring Norway was the radiochemist Ellen Gleditsch (1879-1968) whose scientific travels were the subject of Anna Cabanel's (Groningen) paper. Gleditsch worked for quite some time in Marie Curie's laboratory and was integrated in her scientific network. The subsequent travel to the United States, Cabanel argued, served to establish Gleditsch' reputation as an independent scientist and was instrumental in her further career.

ROZEMARIJN VAN DE WAL (Groningen) and LISA SVANFELDT-WINTER (Stockholm) opted for different media as source material to study the construction of persona by women scientists. Svanfeldt-Winter used the literary reflections that were written by the Finnish folklorist Elsa Enäjärvi (1901-1951) as a result of her stay in the United Kingdom. Enäjärvi spent some time in Crosby Hall, the club of the IFUW, where she met a lot of women scientists. It changed her view on female scientists, who she favorably portrayed as modern academic women. For professor in economic history at LSE Eileen Power (1889-1940) it was equally important to be both scholarly and beautiful, as Van de Wal showed through an analysis of many photographs that revealed Power's dressing style. Power was contrasted with Marie

Curie, whose dress was far more sober, and in no way resembled the fashionable *salonnière* that Power purported to be.

In her closing remarks, REBECCA ROGERS (Paris) stressed the importance of gender issues as a connecting thread throughout the conference. She pointed out the ongoing tension between the will to conform to certain masculine gender norms by women scientists, whilst breaking the female gender norms that excluded women from science; women scientists were 'acting in' and 'acting out' at the same time. Persona seems a very fruitful concept to study this further and opened up some avenues for further research. Following an approach followed by Maria Rentetzi, she proposed to follow objects instead of people; further, she proposed to give more attention to the 'rank and file' rather than the big names and encouraged following the route of investigating both single-sex and mixed-sex networks.

### **Conference overview:**

#### *Opening lecture*

Lyvia Diser and Geert Vanpaemel, (Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Science and the Arts), The role and place of networks in the female scientist's biography

#### *Keynote lecture*

Maria Rentetzi (National Technical University of Athens), The power of the ephemeral, unstable and informal networks of women in science

#### *Papers*

Kaat Wils and Pieter Huistra (KU Leuven), Belgian women scientists and their travels during the Inter War Years

Kirsti Niiskanen (Stockholm University), Struggle for recognition. The Swedish economist Karin Kock's persona rejected

Rozemarijn van de Wal (University of Groningen), Eileen Power. A life in pictures

Lisa Svanfeldt-Winter (Stockholm University), The Finnish folklorist Elsa Enäjärvi-Haavio's networks in the International Federation of Universi-

ty Women and her shaping of a scientific persona  
in 1927-1951

Anna Cabanel (University of Groningen), Dual  
crossing: From Norway to France, then to the USA.  
Analysis of the radiochemist Ellen Gleditsch's sci-  
entific journeys (1907-1914)

Marie-Elise Hunyadi (University of Geneva),  
From science to politics: Study of several career  
trajectories of IFUW's representatives at intergov-  
ernmental organizations

*Closing remarks*

Rebecca Rogers (Paris Descartes University)

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at  
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