

## **The critical orientation in research on historical school narrative and its relation with the history of women**

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### **Abstract**

*The article attempts to present selected theoretical standpoints concerning the place and role of school textbook narrative in teaching history to school students.*

*In this context we posit a hypothesis about the hybrid construction (history memories and ideology) of the narration for teaching history in Polish school textbooks in lower secondary schools (gymnasium)<sup>i</sup>. The research was undertaken between 2010-2014. We focus on the issues of the role of gender in history textbooks; a perspective which is visible in Western culture but almost not present in the teaching of history in Poland.*

*Our starting point for this research was concerned with how to close this gap and also draw upon research experiences from French and English experiences, showing that the quality of history textbooks has deep social consequences for the perception and stereotyping of the roles of men and women in public life.*

*The general issues concerning the critical orientation are illustrated by the results of our research findings.*

**Keywords:** *critical dimension of historical school education, women in historical school narration*

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### **School history teaching as a research area within history didactics**

According to Jerzy Maternicki, history didactics is an ‘applied science’ (Maternicki 2004, p.3). In a similar manner history didactics is also defined by Henri Moniot (Moniot 2001, p. 71; Moniot, Serwański 2000). Thus understood, its subject and goals

make it a sub-discipline of history, oriented towards studying the crossovers between academic historical knowledge and the social functioning of that knowledge as well as accompanying them with a social awareness of the past which is present in the modern world.

On one hand we do have historical education of a society founded, at least potentially, on the basis of scholarly knowledge of the past, but on the other there are ‘incomparably more complex relationships our contemporaries have with said past’ (Maternicki 1986; Szpociński 1985, p.56). On one hand historical, on the other collective memory (Maternicki 1986; Szpociński 1985, p.56); school history education versus the broadly understood culture of history. This means that by researching, organizing and reflecting on the process of the transmission of historical knowledge and its dissemination in schools, we are necessarily working at the point of contact between academia and school, politics and culture, taught history and collective memory. Such a placing of history didactics is all the more understandable taking into account how our attitude towards academic history has changed in the last decades. Pierre Nora points out that until now:

“(…) History was the sphere of the collective; memory of the individual. The idea that memory can be collective, emancipatory, and sacred turns its meaning inside out. (...) The idea that collectivities have a memory implies a far-reaching transformation in the status of individuals and their relations to the community.” (Nora 1974)

Nora also points out that together with a change of the role and place of academic history on the map of social references to the past, also our understanding of identity changed:

“For identity has been transformed from an individual and subjective notion into a collective, quasi-formal and objective one.” (Nora 2001) “‘One is not born a woman,’ Simone de Beauvoir remarked, ‘one becomes one’. It might serve as a catch phrase for all identities created by self-assertion”. (Nora 2001).

This situation, adds Nora, influenced a change in the status of the historian. He points to the two big movements within the methodology which opened new horizons for historians. On one hand we have

“undermining the classical foundations of historical objectivity [on the other] investing the historical gaze with the present” (Nora, 1987, p. 5),

as what he takes part in and researches at the same time, and what lies at the foundation of a repeatedly asked question about his status. Maybe that is what Nora had in mind when he spoke of the relationship between a historian and the present,

expressed by a necessary abandonment of the belief that the historians' history is free from emotions and imagination (let's add: from politics, ethics and aesthetics). Henri Moniot reaches similar conclusions, writing that history by definition engages with the social demand for it, and becomes part of collective ideas, a unique recycling of scholarly knowledge. Therefore history teaching is not just a transmission of scholarly knowledge about the past, agreed on by historians, but it is a complex practice of incorporating that knowledge into the social order, where both school and academia belong (Moniot, 2001, p. 71). Of course this new status of the historian and history imposes the need to ask a question about the responsibility for the social effects of pursuing/making history accessible to the general public. The answer, probably one of many, may lie in widening the scope of reflection and asking not only about what happened and why, but also how we acquire that knowledge, how and from what perspective we construct the images of the past; what knowledge, motivations, expectations, emotions, imagination and experience are behind those constructs. It is an open (as opposed to the hidden one) programme to communicate research results, particularly at the school level. History appears then at the same time as a scholarly truth about the past, as a truth of establishing current meanings of that knowledge by social actors, in this case the professional historian, but also the history pedagogue, the teacher, and finally by the school student (Skórzyńska, 2013, p. 143-160).

Although modern history didactics, through its male and female researchers, more boldly notices this change in the status of history and more often openly admits its role as an 'applied science' of history engaged in studying its social uses, there is still no general consensus. The argument is based on a belief – shared by many of us - in the superiority of school history (academic knowledge) over other social practices regarding the past and marginalization (making taboos) of the fact that the state and the common people engage in constructing historical education school programmes from a perspective which is other than scholarly. Meanwhile, history education in school is a 'complex game' between 'societal needs and initiatives' and the historians' history (Lautier, Allieu-Mary, 2008, p. 95-131).

History education in school does not exist in a vacuum, but is entangled in conflicting postulates of its scholarly and social use. It is the subject of lively discussion, tension and disputes which apply to both academic and educational institutions as well as to politicians and the whole culture industry. The quality of that debate depends on: the degree of democratization of the state and the civic awareness of its inhabitants; on the ability to argue about the responsibilities and needs of the community, and which rights the state represents (Kałużna, 2012; Wolff-Powęska, 2013). Hence the need for critical orientation which would not only open teaching to the new trends in the humanities, but also permit tendencies which are already visible. Academic historians

not only research conditions and the course of the didactic process, not only form concepts of learning/teaching history, but also: (1) train historians to be teachers; (2) prepare, or at least consult, on the national syllabus and curricula; (3) write textbooks; (4) teach in schools; (5) initiate experimental studies; (6) head academia and advanced classes; (7) bring to life selected forms of cultural history.

In any case they are working at the crossroads of various dimensions of history as one of many forms of social referencing to the past as well as between theory and educational practice.

History educators who are experienced experts in the subject of history and in the methods of teaching it have a complex role. They influence the historical education of society. This implies the necessity to reflect on both the research subject (in this case historical education) and their involvement in its implementation. The consequence of this state of affairs is the postulate to rethink the tasks of history didactics in relation to social life and culture, as well as an open discussion about the role of history educators – causative, indirect and direct – in shaping the knowledge and identity of pupils in Polish public schools. This is the first condition of the critical orientation in history didactics. The second condition concerns the history educators (non)awareness of making, openly or covertly, according to a programme or randomly, a choice of not only the content but also the values on which the historical and collective memory of pupils are founded. It is all the more important because, as Paul Ricoeur states, those choices are made even on the cognitive plane of historical experience (Ricoeur 2006, p.660 -661), where the knowledge originates and then is transmitted into the dissemination of historical knowledge in school. The third condition of critical orientation in history didactics is a consensus as to the interdisciplinary character of both the subject of its research and the methodologies, methods and research tools used by didacticians (educational practitioners). Here didactics are well harmonized with new trends in humanities<sup>ii</sup>, defined by Ewa Domańska as a discipline:

“Which, among others, includes cultural studies, postcolonial studies, various ethnic studies as well as gender studies, queer studies, gay and lesbian studies, disabled studies, animal studies, and thing studies (Domańska, 2006, p.17; Pomorski, 2004, p. 131-133).”

Meanwhile, although selected trends in the “new humanities” go well with a postulate for the critical orientation in history didactics – not only arguing the need for research in this field, but also the need to implement its findings into the project of historical education in schools, those postulates remain still more in the theoretical sphere, very slowly followed by actual changes within the goals, contents and methods in history education. Similar conclusions have also been reached by European didacticians,

systematically preparing reports on the state of education (the practical application of history education by teachers) considering various aspects of it, and writing about

“a difficult balance between a transmission of collective memory and education of the future critical citizens” (Bonafoux, De Cock-Pierrepont, Falaize, 2007).

And here we are coming to the heart of the matter, namely the question as to which history should be taught in Polish schools –important history, political history, wars, great leaders and monarchs, or existential history under the umbrella of the ‘new humanities’” including the history of families, women, everyday life. We can agree that in both cases the point is ‘the social use of history’. Therefore it is not about a relationship between academic history and school history, or historical memory versus collective memory, but about competitive (are we sure about that?) values and interests shaping collective (our) identity of our youth for now as well as for the future. So what are those values and interests, according to the postulates of critical didactics?

### **History textbooks and the history of women**

To consider the above question, we have reached for the ‘fetish’ of school education (Liczą się nauczyciele. Raport o stanie edukacji 2013, p. 227-228) in Poland – a school textbook for teaching/learning history in the gymnasium, in connection with the (non)presence of women in those textbooks.

A non-classical definition of a history textbook states that the textbook “works” at the crossing of two main functions in culture and social life, which are cognition (a vehicle carrying up-to-date historical knowledge) and identity (a source of the message/shaping collective memory).

In the first instance, when a textbook is a vehicle of historical knowledge, the authors are considered primarily responsible for the truthful, up-to-date, methodologically accurate image of the past represented by the textbook narrative (Zamorski, 2008, p. 60-61).

It is here where the gravity of asking these questions about the methodology of writing school history, the choice of methodological paradigm that permits or prevents the presence of women in school history, appears. Our research leaves no illusions in this respect. The quantitative representation of women and men, both in the main text and in the visual material which comprised 28 textbooks at the lower secondary level (gymnasium, grade 1-3), shows a vast disproportion to the detriment of women. In each textbook regardless of its historical period (from prehistory until the year 1918),

male heroes constitute not less than 90% of all the characters mentioned by name (Chmura-Rutkowska, Głowacka-Sobiech, Skórzyńska, 2015, p. 48-71). And these are not always the most commonly known male historical figures, on the contrary, the average man, providing he fits into the political puzzle, has a much greater chance to make his mark in school history than an outstanding woman. We can add to this the additional tendency to repeat the names and surnames of the same men, no matter how positive or negative a role they played in history, as well as extensive descriptions of male activities in political, military, economical and social fields. This can rarely be observed in the case of women. Women appear primarily as a collective figure, with the exception of goddesses and are rarely present in textbooks in the role of female rulers. There is an open question of why this is so, when we have “new humanities” that organize both older and current trends in the methodology of history in order to orient them to the emancipation of women, marginalized in earlier studies and historical writings. Why is school history primarily political history, and its causal agent is man, when the world and Polish historiography has already long ago worked through a pattern of the effective participation of women in history? It is evidenced by numerous valuable publications from the French Annales school, Anglo-Saxon historical-cultural studies, as well as the Polish version of the history of women developed by the team of Anna Żarnowska, and most recently by the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Science. The presence of women in school historical narratives is justified today not only by the availability of the sources on them, as well as really impressive historio-graphical material<sup>iii</sup>, but also a theoretical background that allows us to successfully apply the history of women into school knowledge. The source of this deficit is undoubtedly linked to the attachment of the authors of the textbooks a (both male and female) to classical (positivist or modernist) views of history, as evidenced by the preponderance of political and military history over social history and everyday life history, which prevents especially so called ordinary women as participants in making history and heroines.

Most of all history textbooks are one of the most efficient tools for the reproduction of theories and ideologies, legitimizing those currently in power. Textbooks become the sources of values and social norms particularly valued in a given society that are preserved and reproduced within them (Bourdieu, Passeron, 2006, p. 73). This is the reason why, as our research shows, few heroines named in school textbook narratives are women of high social status, women who are well-born, rich, educated and religious (Chmura-Rutkowska, Głowacka-Sobiech, Skórzyńska, 2015).

This is also why women with lower social status are incorporated in the same textbooks into a crowd of anonymous figures, a collection of heroines from the past, devoid of any historical agency (Chmura-Rutkowska, Głowacka-Sobiech, Skórzyńska, 2015).



These and other examples drawn from our research allow us to critically assess the school historical narratives considering the place and role, usually stereotyped and often marginal, which is attributed to women. Nevertheless it can also be admitted that, however unfair, these stories of women had occurred in the past. Therefore, from the point of view of the correctness of historical knowledge these narratives are plausible. But from the point of view of the culturally and politically shaped image of women among Polish secondary school female and male students these narratives are far from sufficient, not giving answers to contemporary questions about the meaning of their choices and beliefs that shape not only their presence, but also their future. History textbooks are not only about transmitting historical knowledge, but also about memory. In this sense it is the result of the state's historical policy and a tool to shape collective memory, it is supported by the syllabuses, programmes of study, and from 1999 the National Curriculum which conveys the state's intentions as to what (which topics), how (using what methods and skills) and to what purpose a school student who finishes subsequent stages of mandatory education in the Polish school should know/learn something. Taking into account the cognitive and identity functions of the history textbook, we can say, slightly simplifying, that the second mores determine the first. A history textbook is a product of a culture of history, meaning culture/cultures where the past is a subject of greater or lesser valuation and as such it is not solely an object of cognition but also a vehicle of memory and a source of shaping a collective and/or individual identity (Nora 1974, p.401). That is how Barbara Szacka understands the place of history textbooks, as a medium for collective memory (Szacka, 2012). Also Henri Moniot emphasizes this facet of the history textbook, writing that it is

“the effect, the sign, the vehicle or the instrument of values, opinions, ideologies”  
(Moniot, 1993, p.198),

a substitute for experiencing the past which is absent from ‘here and now’, an answer to the social fears which makes it a tool of current ideologies, moral compass shaping pupils’ attitudes by showing examples of good and bad deeds (Moniot, 1993, p.198). Another author, Keith Crawford, states that “textbooks are cultural artefacts and in their production and their use inside classrooms confront a range of issues to do with ideology, politics and values which in themselves function at a variety of different levels of power, status and influence” (Crawford 2003, p.5).

The above-mentioned process was clearly observable in our research on school historical narratives at lower secondary level, which was preceded by an analysis of a key document, known in Poland as the core curriculum for general education

(*podstawa programowa kształcenia ogólnego*). In the part referring to gymnasium (lower secondary) education it indicates a classicist approach to history, in which it is typical to employ the concept of a “historical acting subject” (Wrzosek, 2008, p. 85)<sup>iv</sup> that organizes historical periods into consistent stories. On the one hand it can be understood as a collective and anthropomorphised agent: civilization, culture, country, empire, monarchy and kingdom, nation, social system, economic, religious, legal and political system, but also revolution, war, uprising, national, social and political movement, city, land and continent. The concept of “unitary subject” relates to Christians, nobility, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Piast (dynasty), Jagiellon (dynasty), the Polish Legions and other military and social groups or communities, but also to anonymous citizens, residents, advocates, slaves, subjects, the colonized, invaders, the Bolsheviks, etc. On the other hand though “unitary subjects” are constructed as “real people of flesh and blood, known by name”, and “playing a distinctive historical role” (Wrzosek, 2008, p. 85): Charlemagne, Otto III, Boleslaw Krzywousty, Casimir the Great, Christopher Columbus, Vasco da Gamma, Ferdinand Magellan, Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Erasmus, Copernicus, Galileo, John Calvin, Martin Luther, Nicolaus Rej, Jan Kochanowski, Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski, Bohdan Khmelnytsky, Louis XIV, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Stanislaw Konarski, Stanislaw Leszczynski, Napoleon. Needless to say, that this group does not have a single woman.

From the perspective of the core curriculum of general education from 2008, the participation of women in history did not take place. It would however be unjust to search only this educational document for a full knowledge of the details of identity and cognitive function of secondary school historical education in the context of (non)presence of women in it. At this point it is worth being reminded that, while the very core curriculum imposes in our opinion a classicist model of narrative (in spite of the fact that the general aims are formulated in a modern way, the specific aims are still very traditional), the legislator provided at least partial autonomy for the authors of curricula and textbooks, as well as teachers, school boards and the school environment in the area of selection, and even the creation of these programmes. Therefore, although there were only a few, some authors of history textbooks for secondary schools, tried to take into account the history of women. Sometimes the attempt was successful, but more often it reveals the attachment of the authors to the patriarchal order of the presentation of the historical reality.

For example, women who ended up on the pages of history textbooks, including infant princesses, duchesses and queens, are presented primarily as wives, daughters, mothers and sisters of famous men, as victims of the dynastic policies or possibly as secondary characters, bravely accompanying their husbands in diplomatic battles.



An iconic example is the highly-educated Hedwig of Anjou, an open-minded politician trying to speak with her own voice, who was presented in textbooks primarily as an object, and often as a victim of the dynastic politics of Hungary, Poland and Lithuania (Chmura-Rutkowska, Głowacka-Sobiech, Skórzyńska, 2015a, p. 37-43; Chmura-Rutkowska, Głowacka-Sobiech, Skórzyńska, 2013, p. 317-349).

Within the same order of patriarchal representation of the historical world there appears a tendency to present women in relation to their beauty or their role in love affairs, scandals and intrigues (interesting, and often scandalous facts from the lives of famous women are constructed as knowledge of secondary importance, added to the historical narrative in order to make it more interesting for the reader). The exemplification of such a tendency is the image of Hedwig of Anjou who is pictured in textbooks as a young girl, overwhelmed by her youthful love for prince Habsburg, but married eventually to a "savage" Jagiełło. So it is in the case of Barbara Radziwiłł, whose presence in the textbooks was solely determined by the story of her love for King Sigismund Augustus. The figure of Cleopatra is presented in history textbooks in a similar, romance-thriller context, when we read about her attempts to salvage the independence of Egypt by establishing close, intimate relationships with famous Romans. The excessive focus on dramatic events is apparent in case of Bona Sforza accused of the death (by poisoning) of the Piast of Mazovia. Another example is the dynastic struggle for power of the capricious and insensitive Marie Antoinette, who led a dissolute and carefree life, for which she received a well-deserved punishment at the hands of her subjects.

Each textbook approved for school use refers directly to the requirements of the core curriculum. It is, therefore, the analysis of textbook narratives that gives adequate clear picture of the socially preferred knowledge, ideas, values and beliefs transmitted via teaching in school that concern the past, but are in an unbreakable relationship with the present and the future. It is not the core curriculum itself, but the history textbooks that – according to the report of the Institute of Educational Research on the implementation of the core curriculum in history teaching at lower secondary level (2011) – are treated by many teachers as the only and the most important source for designing history lessons. According to many teachers, the textbooks include all of the material that is supposed to be delivered to students (implemented during history lessons), and in this sense, the textbooks replace the curriculum. They are also an important source of teaching materials used in history lessons (Realizacja podstawy programowej z historii w gimnazjach 2011 (2012), p. 32-33).

How it works in practice? In the heated atmosphere of the current Polish discussion on women's rights, secondary school students receive a rather peculiar historical message, which is a specific kind of narrative: the narrative of absence.

And so, one or two sentences in the textbooks indicating that both in ancient Babylon (Moryksewicz, Pacholska, Zdziabek, 2009, p. 21) and Sparta (Kowalewski, Kąkolweski, Plumińska-Mieloch, 2009, p. 57) women held a relatively high social position are accompanied by entire paragraphs about the lack of women rights and their absolute subordination to men in Egypt, Athens, China, India, Israel and Rome. Interestingly, none of the textbooks mention the word “patriarchy”, no textbook addresses questions about the reasons for the dominance of men in the public sphere. A complementary role in supporting this androcentric narrative and the vision of society without women emerging from it, is played by contemporary visualizations of the social structure (infographics) that appear in many textbooks. These infographics do not include women as representatives of social groups, and there appears no comment on that fact. Women do not appear in the visualization of social structures until the Middle Ages, which does not change the fact that the narrative does not change and the history of women is written with an excessive focus on their lack of rights.

Even in case of women in the Middle Ages, who possessed specific rights, ruled and had an unquestionable authority in their social circle, the authors of textbooks do not take advantage of the potential for including women in the narrative. Such is the case of Herrada from Landsberg, Mathilda of Toskany and Mathilda of Schwabia, as well as Hedwig of Anjou (already mentioned) and also Isabella of Castile. The textbook description of the status of women and men in Middle Ages is similar to those in Antiquity: and more often and more eagerly refers to the underprivileged position of woman in marriage and family; points to the limited access of women to education, to inheritance as well as to holding important functions in public life.

In Renaissance times, the basic institution for organizing the life of women was the family. It influenced women’s status and their rights Therefore the dominant information in history textbooks concerned mostly royal and aristocratic families and less commonly, the bourgeois, and very rarely – the peasant families. Knowledge about the changing status of women and their rights appears no earlier than in the textbook narrative about the Enlightenment. There are even attempts, though not very common, to address critically the issue of the changing awareness of people in the Enlightenment period concerning the place and role of women in the family, and social and intellectual life. Apart from information in the written text, there is also an increase in the amount of visual material, illustrating the participation of women in public life, including various forms of informal education, fashionable in the era of the Enlightenment. In two textbooks there are references to the Enlightenment salon of Madame Geoffrin. In one textbook there is a portrait of Madame Pompadour with an accompanying task to define the attributes, that would enable the student to determine

her interest in science and the arts. With regard to the history of Poland, the subjectivity of women (their status and rights) is subordinated to the national consciousness and patriotic attitudes of women in connection with the Poland's loss of independence in the late eighteenth century. However, this is not the subjectivity of a female citizen, but rather the one of a self-sacrificing woman.

The question of the acquisition of rights by women is one of the most important topics relating to the history of women in the nineteenth century onwards until 1918. Here the leading theme is, of course, the emancipation of women, meaning their active participation in the struggle for social and economic rights, as well as for the right to vote. This issue is comprehensively discussed in seven textbooks. The narrative about the European suffragette movement is accompanied in the textbooks by rich visual material, including archival photographs of a suffragette demonstration in New York in 1912 and the arrest of an English suffragette protesting in front of Buckingham Palace. Noteworthy are also numerous references to the women's emancipation movement in questions and tasks set for the students. Some textbooks include selected source texts, related directly to women's rights in the nineteenth century. Interesting also is the idea of linking matters concerning the emancipation of women within wider social contexts involving such issues as anti-Semitism, child mortality, property issues, education, work; this perspective is chosen by the authors of only some textbooks.

A separate topic in the textbooks which were analyzed, and closely linked to the emancipation of women, is the issue of women's right to vote. The teaching of nineteenth century history in secondary schools is unique in comparison with the earlier historical periods, because for the first time the authors of the textbooks write about not only the discrimination of women and their struggle for their rights, but also the first results of these efforts. In order to mark this change in status, new roles, interests and activities of women in modern times, many textbooks contain photographs showing women as cyclists, automobile enthusiasts, students and gymnasts. The discussion in the school textbook narratives about the status and rights of women at the turn of the nineteenth century appears in four textbooks in connection with the history of the First World War. The authors argue that women gained their rights as a result of the extraordinary situation during wartime, when they took a major part of the responsibilities hitherto fulfilled, both in the family and in society, by men.

Because in the Polish education system (legal status for 2016) history teaching at the compulsory, lower secondary level finishes in the year 1918, graduates leave school with the otherwise legitimate belief that with the end of World War I, women were

granted all their rights and that they safely and permanently entered into public life, where they began to fulfil the roles previously reserved exclusively for men.

The shift of the narrative regarding the status and rights of women in the secondary school history textbooks could suggest that this trend was upheld and continued in textbooks for the first grade of upper secondary schools (a total of 8 textbooks approved for school use in 2012, basic level), where history teaching covers the period from 1918 to the present.

Meanwhile, our research conducted within the project "Gender in textbooks" (Głowacka-Sobiech, Michalski, Napierała, Skórzyńska, 2016, p. 7- 40), again proved a more general tendency to portray history as the history of men (the same ratio of 9:1 between male and female figures named in textbooks). These textbooks do not mention women's rights (except for a brief reference to the sexual revolution, contraception and abortion in one of the eight books), as though the authors of the textbooks covering recent history tacitly assumed that the women's issue was solved with the acquisition of women's suffrage. Interestingly though, the extensive comments on the status and rights of women after 1918 are made in the textbooks in relation to their work. On the one hand, the emancipation of women through labour is discussed in the context of the Second World War as an emergency situation, when there was a shortage of males in the workforce. On the other hand, the work of women appeared in the context of the socialist state, but became reduced to trivial statement about "women on tractors" – a propaganda action in Stalinist Poland which ceased the '60s, when the state withdrew from the emancipation programme for working women, reminding them again that the principal place of their activity should be home and family.

Given that history textbooks are a powerful tool for shaping the collective memory, and given that - using Pierre Bourdieu's terminology – the textbook is both an effect of and an instrument of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, Passeron, 2006, p. 73), and a powerful one, considering the mass scale and scope of possible impacts, both the quantity and quality of existing references to the history of women determines the knowledge, ideas and emotions of students of lower secondary school. What are the knowledge, ideas and emotions like?

When we consider the way the status and rights of women are described in history textbooks, we tend see women from the past solely as nameless, collective victims of big politics, as sacrificing mothers and workers of the nineteenth century uprisings and wars period, as suffragettes, and eventually as beneficiaries of voting rights, that have finally won their equality. Since then, i.e., from the interwar period, women's history in school textbooks loses its importance. Again covered up (extinguished) by

the big history (of men), the history of women is reduced to episodic life descriptions of popular artists or more rarely, female politicians and numerous, but nameless victims of armed conflicts, natural disasters or economic crises.

For the historian, a researcher of collective memory, it is equally important to look at what is in the textbooks, and what is omitted. In the textbooks studied there was no reference made to the growing share of women in the labour market and not a word is mentioned about the process, initiated in the 50s, of raising the level of education among women and the accompanying rise in their social and cultural status. There was no information about female researchers (with the one exception of Maria Skłodowska-Curie), as well as a complete silence about the gender pay gap that has never been filled throughout the history of modern Poland (*Kobiety i mężczyźni na rynku pracy*, 2014). The rapid development of the historiography of women was not noticed in any of the textbooks, and only one in eight textbooks mentioned feminism.

## **Conclusion**

Critical theories treat school textbooks as tools to reproduce theories and ideologies legitimized by the nation-state. At the same time they also ‘expose’, as contained in the text and illustrations, values and social norms held especially dear by particular societies. A state-run, centralized system of governance of education causes textbooks – using terminology coined by Pierre Bourdieu – to be the effect and at the same time (if we take into account its mass scale and scope of possible influence) a powerful instrument of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, Passeron, 2000, p.4).

Bourdieu's symbolic violence is used by those, who treat school texts as tools for shaping national, religious, civic, European, as well as individual identity. In this perspective, the (non)presence of women in history textbooks on one hand reflects the mental condition of society (collective memory), the mentality both “produced” and “taught” by these textbooks; on the other hand this (non)presence of women can be the starting point to change this mentality (Solarska, 2009, p. 64-65).

Nicole Lucas, a French scholar renowned for her research on women's history in school textbook narrative, emphasizes the fact that a deficit of such narrative is inversely proportional to the actual participation of women in history and their representation in Western historiography since at least the 1960s (Lucas, 2009). However it is not enough, using Monika Bobako's argument, to compensate for the absence of women in history narrative (‘compensatory historiography’) by supplementing history textbooks with “lost chapters regarding the forgotten half of human race” (Bobako, 2005, p. 256-265). The postulate to take into account women's history in school textbooks does not mean an emancipation of their/our history at the



expense of the history of others, but the emancipation of us all. Rita Felski notes that history is not just a ‘philosophical problem’, but also an urgent social and pragmatic concern. For many individuals and groups it has a decisive meaning when it comes to feeling human and societal self-subjectivity” (Felski, 2002, p. 299).

Can we assume that the authors of currently approved textbooks for teaching/learning history in the Polish gymnasium contribute to the shaping of Rita Felski’s desired ‘better history’ of women<sup>v</sup>? Taking into account the historical development of the school textbook in Poland and having analysed in this context nine sets of history textbooks for gymnasium (reminder: in total we analysed 28 textbooks) we can ascertain that, to various degrees, those textbooks aspire to present the history of excluded, marginalized, voiceless women, as a common and shared memory of the past. Living proof of this trend exists in the sensitivity of the authors of chosen textbooks to include women’s history. It is disquieting however that many of the authors/authoresses prefer the strategy of compensation when it comes to women’s presence in history textbooks, namely by the practice of ‘smuggling’ their history in, more often as a curious fact rather than obligatory knowledge; on additional spreads added to the main text rather than as intrinsic part of the narrative history of the nation, society, culture; more often as an anonymous collective rather than specific figures of women and girls. This practice in turn promotes simplification and stereotyping of women’s history, for example: depicting them as wives of famous men, emphasising romanticised and sensational threads in their biographies, accentuating their beauty, presenting them as a collective historical hero, quoting unfavourable opinions about women from the past without appropriate critical comment, the presentation of numerous illustrations only to accentuate the achievements of their authors or the styles and artistic conventions of a particular historical period.

All of this means that although the number of women in history textbooks for the gymnasium increased significantly, they are still occupying ‘the side tracks’ of history, ‘nooks’ of memory, and ‘margins’ of textbook pages.

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<sup>i</sup> Presented here are main findings from the research on the (non)presence of women in history textbooks, which are the result of comprehensive quantitative and qualitative studies of 28 textbooks, approved for classroom use in the Polish gymnasium since 2010. Phase one of our research involved the content analysis (the main text as well as the paratext), breaking it down by reference to the individual, anonymous, and collective presence of women and men. During the next stage of the research we analysed strategies for presenting women in a school textbook narrative. An analysis of the main text and the paratext were accompanied by the study of iconographic materials, subjected to the same rules as written text. In this case we have used the historical-didactic model of analysis of the iconographic sources. To acquire quantitative and qualitative data pertaining to the presence of women in the school textbook narrative for the gymnasium, we have also researched the headings of units, chapters, and sections in textbooks; and once more in the main text and the paratext, finally analysing visual images, taking into account the presence of women depicted as heroines of the story in the captions for reproductions, illustrations, and photographs. In the course of qualitative analysis we have developed a coding

system, resulting from the studied narrative, which included the following key categories of themes and type references regarding women, cyclically repetitive in successive epochs and periods of history: (1) Famous Women, (2) Woman. Status and rights; (3) woman. Intimate relationships, marriage, family, childbearing; Woman. Education; (4) Woman. Work and activities; (5) Woman. Art and culture; (6) Woman. Religious life.

Subsequently we have also developed coding sub-categories, turning school history narrative inside out across topics and themes dedicated to women's history: (1) Woman. Power; (2) Woman. Victim of Violence; (3) Woman. Body, beauty, sexuality, illness, Health; (4) Woman. Costume, fashion; (5) Woman. Symbol, allegory, caricature; (6) Woman shown – untold. A thorough discussion on research findings [in:] I. Chmura – Rutkowska, E. Głowacka – Sobiech, I. Skórzyńska, „Niegodne historii? O nieobecności i stereotypowych wizerunkach kobiet w świetle podręcznikowej narracji historycznej w gimnazjum”, Poznań 2015.

<sup>ii</sup> Polish didactics included selected ideas of the „new humanities”, as well as: conferences and monographs, dedicated to the student and „new humanities”, education, identity and memory, emancipating dimension of historical education, women's history in the XIX and XX century Polish textbooks, etc.

<sup>iii</sup>Bibliography that covers this topic is very extensive. Here are the most significant authors. N. Zemon Davis, M. Perrot, G. Duby, J. Scott, P. Grimal, J. Kelly, M. Dumont, G. Fraisse, F. Thébaud, Ch. Bard, A. Żarnowska, A. Szwarc, M. Bogucka, E. Domańska, M. Ciechomska, K. Ratajczak, A. Kusiak, M. Szymczak, M. Solarska, B. Popiołek, D. Kałwa, T. Czerska, M. Fidelis, E. Kondratowicz, B. Klich-Kluczevska, S. Penn, D. Żołędź – Strzelczyk, J. Strzelczyk. More: Chmura – Rutkowska, Głowacka – Sobiech, Skórzyńska, 2015, p. 607-618.

<sup>iv</sup>We use here the descriptive definition of a „historical acting subject” (*jednostkowy podmiot sprawczy*) proposed by Wojciech Wrzosek and identified by him within nineteenth century historiography. According to Wrzosek the „historical acting subject” “is (...) a particular person of flesh and blood, known by name, usually an individual with a distinctive historical role: a monarch, a chief legislator, a religious reformer, a politician, etc. Moreover, what is significant, it is sometimes also an acting subject (...) of a specific kind, such as France, the People, Aristocracy, Protestants, the Roman Empire, Turks, Jews, Habsburgs, etc. All these actors, including God or gods, are recognized among historians by drawing the analogy to a human being” In: W. Wrzosek, O trzech rodzajach stronniczości historii, [w:] Pamięć i polityka historyczna. Doświadczenia Polski i jej sąsiadów, red. S.M. Nowinowski, J. Pomorski, R. Stobiecki, Łódź 2008, s. 85.