

From Scholarly to Social Emancipation: Reflections Regarding the Academic Peregrination of Romanian Women to Western Universities

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Abstract: This research article questions and analyzes the impact of academic peregrination to Western European Universities upon the career paths of Romanian women, in the last part of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. It highlights various patterns regarding the ways the Romanian women who studied abroad subsequently chose to put into practice their hard-earned knowledge. Based on a number of individual feminine biographies, it examines how these women forged careers in the Romanian educational and scientific world (with a particular interest on higher education institutions) or, as an alternative, how they became important figures in the charitable sector. For the most part, the Romanian female students trained in Western Europe between 1880 and 1945 had a significant contribution to the modernization of their country of origin. They equally influenced the gradual change of women's social, economic and cultural status in Romania and in Europe, thus further bridging the gap between the eastern and the western states.

Keywords: Romanian female students, female peregrinatio academia to Western Universities (1880-1945), female academic training, careers paths of educated Romanian women, female emancipation in Romania in the last part of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century

Preliminaries

After the 1848 revolution, the subsequent creation of the United Romanian Principalities (1859) and later of the modern Romanian state (1866-1877-1881-1918), academic peregrination to Western European universities was a customary *rite of passage* for the Romanian socio-political and cultural elites. This trend had at least several explanations.

One reason, common for the entire region, was the understandable desire of the emerging national states of Eastern Europe and the Balkans to modernize themselves and overcome their developmental gap with the help of a well-trained elite. For some of these countries, obtaining a graduate or postgraduate diploma from a Western University was very highly valued and ensured better integration into the local labour market, especially in public administration or academia. In return, this often translated for the Western powers – such as France or Germany – into an opportunity to exert a significant influence over Eastern Europe, under the pretext of cultural affinities (Karady, 2003, 24-25). Another cause was the situation of the Eastern national universities: they were not only young ones, lacking experienced specialists and an appropriate teaching and research infrastructure (in Romania, the University of Iassy was founded in 1860 and the University of Bucharest in 1864), but also many disciplines – particularly in the field of applied sciences – were not even taught here.

Furthermore, universities in the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires, as well as in the surrounding states, were still reluctant at the turn of the 20th century to receive certain categories of potential students. The most affected by such selective admission policies were the Jews, closely followed by women (Karady, 2003, 25-26). Given that such discrimination was less apparent in Western Europe, understandably, there were not only men seeking to deepen and improve their knowledge at Western universities, but a lot of young female candidates went to study abroad as well. Until the breaking of the First World War in fact, “the proportion of female students among foreign students enrolled at Western universities consistently exceeded that of female students in their home countries, and even that of native students in the West” (Karady, 2003, 27). For example, in the academic year 1905-1906, in France, 57% of the female students enrolled in the Paris University and other superior schools were of foreign origin, while in Switzerland, in 1906-1907, statistics registered a total of 1832 female university students, out of which 92.57% were foreigners, coming predominantly from Russia, Romania, Bulgaria or Serbia (Nastasă, 2006, 110).

After 1918, the intensity of this academic peregrination fluctuated, with highs and lows directly influenced by social, economic and political factors. The brutal instauration of communism put an end after 1945 to this East-West dynamic, but its effects were long-lasting.

The academic peregrination of young Romanians has been studied quite extensively by scholars, who have decrypted and described its main characteristics (Sigmirean, 2000; Nastasă 2007, 166-237; Nastasă-Matei, 2014; Siupur 2019, et alii). As previously mentioned, studying in the West was a decisive step in the appearance of intellectual and, subsequently, professional and political elites in all of South-Eastern Europe, Romania included. For these young men, Western education provided not only the means for social promotion within their nations, but equally the context and the needed leverage for becoming agents of change and modernization (Sigmirean, 2010; Siupur, 2014, 116-126; Nastasă, 2016, 13-31). However, there are still very few comprehensive and systematic works analysing female academic peregrination and, furthermore, the professional outcomes of their studies abroad after these women returned to Romania (Sigmirean, 2021). In fact, most of the gender focused research is exploring the mechanisms and the various stages through which women have established themselves as distinctive voices in the Romanian public life, obtaining political emancipation (Mihăilescu, 2001-2005; Cosma and Țărău, 2002; Mihăilescu 2002; Dimitriu, 2011; Bucur and Miroiu, 2018, et alii). The cultural and charitable associations and societies women were involved in had been equally investigated, although to a smaller extent (Stan, 2010a; Chioveanu, 2004; Negri, 2016 et alii). Even less consideration has been given to the women's professional positions, value and influence, and to the way these things would contribute to the transformation of the feminine status within Romanian society.

Our article intends to partially fill this gap. It aims to study this female peregrination phenomenon, highlighting the late 19th century and the interwar years. While looking at the general trends, this research focuses on how Western educated Romanian women integrated and expressed themselves on the social and cultural scene of their country of origin. More precisely, based on a number of individual feminine biographies, it examines how these women forged careers in the Romanian educational and scientific world (with a particular interest on higher education institutions) or, as an alternative, how they became important figures in the charitable sector. Comparing various professional and personal trajectories, as well as information about stay-at-home female students versus those who chose to study abroad, will offer a more accurate image regarding the progress of the Romanian society in the last two centuries.

Romanian Women Students to Western Universities – Trailblazers and Role Models

Romanian women's accession to academic education was not an easy process. Women were confronted with the traditional mentality of the times, based on a specific ideology of femininity and expected to give priority to marriage over a professional career (implying advanced studies). In addition, there was also a limited number of secondary schools designed to prepare them for university admission. In 1864-1865, when the two local universities (the one in Iassy and the one in Bucharest) were starting to function, there were only four secondary level schools for girls in Romania, offering young females the possibility of graduating a full school cycle/ obtaining a baccalaureate, and, subsequently, of being admitted to university (Caramelea, 2007, 60). The situation would gradually improve, starting in 1880-1890 for the Old Kingdom of Romania, and then from the 1920s onwards, after the creation of Greater Romania (the state that incorporated all the Romanian provinces, formerly belonging to the Austro-Hungarian and the Russian empires – namely Transylvania, Bukovina and Bessarabia), although the gap between girls' and boys' high schools remained significant (Nastasă, 2006, 108-09; Caramelea, 2007, 61-62).

However, the most ambitious and intellectually curious Romanian girls did not hesitate to enrol in the universities, many opting to be educated by private teachers in order to succeed in this endeavour. Unsurprisingly, there was a marked difference between their presence in the academic establishments of their country of origin and the ones from Western Europe.

At the University of Iassy, the first academic institution founded in Romania, in 1864, women are present since the academic year 1879-1880, but until 1883, we can speak only of young females who attended, as in listened to, various faculty courses, without having a proper, full-scale academic enrolment. The academic year 1883-1884 is the first one when three girls managed to obtain their baccalaureate degree and subsequently enrol as full-fledged students. (Rados, 2010, 16-17). Unsurprisingly, women favoured the Faculty of Letters over the others, with the Faculty of Law being the last one to attract their attention. Thus, the percentage of female students at this faculty of the University of Iassy increased from 14% in 1894-1895 up to 48% in 1896-1897, a significant trend, even if not all those enrolled actually completed their academic training and obtained their diplomas (Rados, 2010, 33). In fact, the first female graduate of the Faculty of Letters was registered in 1892, while for the Faculty of Science, the first female graduate was registered in 1894. (Rados, 2010, 30).

In Bucharest, the first woman graduated from the Faculty of Letters of the local university in 1883, the first science graduate followed shortly after, in 1887, while the first female medical graduate was registered in 1890. A similar tendency to the University of Iassy can be detected in the Romanian capital – that is the preference of young girls to study humanities, as statistics show a growth from 5,8% to 14% of female students in the Faculty of Letters, in the first decades of the 20th century (Sircuța, 2006, 136).

As for the universities founded later, i.e. the universities of Cluj and Cernăuți, which opened their doors only in the autumn of 1919 as higher education institutions teaching in Romanian language, the presence of female students would be a constant feature from the beginning, even though the statistics cited them distinctively with a certain delay. Thus, in Cluj, in the academic year 1925-1926 the official reports mentioned 484 female students out of a total of 2297 enrolled students, while in the academic year 1938-1939 there were 628 female students out of a total of 2466 enrolled students. (Anuarul..., 1928, 8; Anuarul..., 1940, 4).

The rather slow but steady progress of female students in the Romanian universities needs to be compared with the presence and performances of Romanian women in the Western academic world. Those who could afford it, did not hesitate to travel to France, Switzerland or Germany and study in their top institutions, often reaching the highest academic level.

Thus, in 1884, Sarmiza Bilcescu enrolled at the Faculty of Law at the Sorbonne, in Paris. Initially accepted with reticence by the professors, she not only obtained her Law degree in 1887, but went on and, on June 12, 1890, was awarded a PhD title in Law. Miss Bilcescu was the first female candidate to obtain a PhD in Law in France, with a doctoral dissertation titled *De la condition légale de la mère en droit roumain et français* [On the Legal Condition of the Mother in Romanian and French Law], in which she aimed to demonstrate the equality of women and men in marriage and regarding the rights of the child. (Boutillier and Laperche, 2006, 7; Chaperon, 2001, 104.) While the honour of being the first European woman that received a PhD title in Law belonged to Marie Popelin, from Belgium, who got her diploma in 1888 (Biographie Nationale, 1976, 734), Bilcescu held another enviable position: she was the first woman in Europe to have been accepted, in 1891, as a member of a bar association, a title she was granted upon her return in her native Romania by the Bucharest bar association. However, she would never practice full-time as a barrister (most likely due to reticence from the general public as well as indirect opposition from her male peers), just offer occasional legal advice, focusing instead on charity work and feminist activities (Ciupală, 2003, 59–60 and 85; Ciochircă, 2003, 52-53; Moceanu, 2017, “Portret: Sarmiza Bilcescu – prima femeie avocat...”).

Another Romanian woman who can be counted amongst the first European females to study Medicine and go as far as a PhD was Maria Cutzarida. Born in 1857, into a minor aristocratic family (her father was a pantler boyar and magistrate), Miss Cutzarida went abroad and finished her secondary studies in Switzerland before enrolling in 1877 to the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Zurich. She would transfer shortly after to the University of Montpellier, in France, where she got her bachelor's degree in medicine, then continued her medical training in Paris. In 1884, she received her medical doctoral degree in France, after writing a paper on gynaecological diseases (Mihăilescu, 2021, "Dr. Maria Cutzarida Crătunescu..."). Like Sarmiza Bilcescu, Miss Cutzarida also opted to return to Romania after her studies. With perseverance, but not without difficulty, she managed to integrate and work in the Romanian medical system, even leading the gynaecology department of the *Philanthropia* hospital in Bucharest for a short while: 1891-1894 (Marcu, 2009, 89-90). Later on, she would get involved in social work, founding several charities for orphans and poor or abandoned children and she also established some of the first nurseries in Romania (Mihăilescu, 2021, "Dr. Maria Cutzarida Crătunescu...").

Embodying a slightly different type of academic peregrination (from Eastern Europe to Romania), but a rather similar professional trajectory, was Alma Mohora-Popoviciu. Born in 1896, in a Romanian family from the Banat region, which at the time was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Alma Mohora started her medical studies at the University of Budapest. After the end of the Great War and the union of Transylvania and Banat with Romania, Alma Mohora continued her training at the Romanian University of Cluj. In 1921 she obtained her medical doctoral degree and married a colleague, dr. Traian Popoviciu, who would later become a full university professor of gynaecology in Cluj. In the same year, Alma Mohora-Popoviciu was hired at the local Faculty of Medicine as a paid university tutor and would subsequently start an academic career teaching dentistry and training generations of medical students for almost 13 years (she is considered the first female Romanian dentist). Since 1933, Alma Mohora-Popoviciu chose to dedicate herself exclusively to her medical practice and quitted teaching but remained in closed contact with the academic environment (Moșoigo, 2011, 292).

After France, German universities were a favourite destination for the Romanian students, who studied mostly law, economics and/or administrative sciences. The numbers speak for themselves: out of the 2700 Eastern European students enrolled in German universities until 1880, about 1150 were of Romanian origin (Siupur, 2014, 123). However, the first Romanian female students in Germany can be found starting from the beginning of the 20th century. Thus, in 1908, three young ladies – Constanța Evolceanu, Beatrice Dimitriu and Gertrud Tiktin – enrolled in the University of Berlin (Nastasă, 2006, 111). At least one of them, namely Constanța Evolceanu (married to university professor Dimitrie Evolceanu) would return to Romania and pursue a

career as a high school teacher. During the Great War, when, in 1917, Bucharest, the Romanian capital, was under German occupation, Constanța Evolceanu would temporarily become the director of the prestigious *Școala Centrală de Fete* – the Girls' Central School.

Just a year later, in 1909, another Romanian woman, Eliza Leonida, became a student at the prestigious Royal Technical Academy of Berlin and graduated in 1912, despite receiving little encouragement and support from her university professors or her male colleagues. (Sircuța, 2006, 148). Miss Leonida, who chose to specialize in chemical engineering, is also a pioneer, as the history of science mentions her amongst the very first females in Europe to get a degree in engineering, after the Irish Alice Perry, who graduated in 1906 from Queen's College Galway, or the Portuguese Rita de Moraes Sarmiento, who in 1894 had graduated as a chartered engineer from the Polytechnic Academy in Porto¹. Despite being offered a job in Germany after her university graduation, Eliza Leonida opted to return to Romania too and had a prolific career at the Romanian Geological Institute. Known professionally as Eliza Leonida-Zamfirescu, under her married name, she excelled in research work, identifying and analysing new coal, oil shale, natural gas, chromium, bauxite or copper resources. (Marcu, 2009, 147-48; Năstase, 2002, 65-127).

Romanian women equally performed in humanities when they chose to attend Western universities. One example is that of Alice Voinescu (née Steriadi). After a short-lived attempt to study medicine, she would switch to the Faculty of Letters at the University of Bucharest, graduating in 1908 with a degree in Philosophy, under the supervision of Titu Maiorescu. At his advice, Alice Steriadi continued her studies in Germany and France, and in 1913 was the first Romanian woman to obtain her PhD diploma in philosophy at the Sorbonne, in Paris. Her thesis, titled "*L'interprétation de la doctrine de Kant par l'École de Marburg. Étude sur l'idéalisme critique*" [The Marburg School's interpretation of Kant's doctrine. A Study in Critical Idealism] and supervised by the famous French philosopher and anthropologist L. Lévy-Bruhl, was well received and appreciated by specialists in the field. The success of this PhD brought her several job offers in the academic world, both in France and in the United States. However, mostly for personal reasons, as she was at the time engaged to be married to the lawyer Stelian Voinescu, Alice chose to return to Romania. Subsequently, she tried to occupy the chair of modern philosophy at the University of Bucharest, but was rejected by the examining commission, not because of her qualifications, which were exemplary ones, but because "a woman cannot be a university professor". However, in 1922, Alice Voinescu obtained her professorship, not at the university, but

¹See <https://www.europeana.eu/ro/exhibitions/pioneers/elisa-leonida-zamfirescu> (accessed April 17, 2023)

at another superior school, the Romanian Royal Academy of Music and Dramatic Art in Bucharest, where she successfully taught theatre history and aesthetics in the interwar years and into the late 1940s. At the same time, she would become a most influential public intellectual and writer, with numerous cultural contributions in the press and at the radio. (Crăciun, 2012, 20-23).

For her part, Eliza Constantinescu-Bagdât, initially a graduate of the Faculty of Letters in Bucharest (1901), obtained a degree in Letters in Paris at the Sorbonne in 1917, and then, in 1918, a degree in classical languages from the same university. A short while later, she continued her studies at the Swiss University of Fribourg, where on July 23, 1924, she would receive her PhD diploma, with a doctoral dissertation entitled *La Querela Pacis d'Érasme*. This was a groundbreaking study in pacifism, favourably received by the likes of the French historian Alphonse Aulard or the Dutch professor N.J. Singels, from the University of Rotterdam. In 1925, an extended edition of her PhD research, titled *De Vauban à Voltaire*, was printed in Paris, also enjoying success. The same year, Eliza Constantinescu-Bagdât returned to her native Romania and from 1926 began a career at the Academy of Higher Commercial and Industrial Studies in Cluj (Transylvania), teaching French. As she moved up through the ranks and tried to reach full professorship, she encountered unexpected adversity. One of her male colleagues, Constantin Lacea, who was professor of German at the same Academy, accused her of plagiarism, more precisely of having copied information from some French authors in the language teaching manuals she had signed and presented as original works. Mrs. Constantinescu-Bagdât was able to retaliate to these accusations, showing that her colleague had adopted a rather similar attitude for his own publications. This scandal went beyond the walls of the Commercial Academy, but neither did it end up in a court of law, nor serve its original purpose, namely, to prevent the professional advancement of Eliza Constantinescu-Bagdât. In 1934, her colleagues, as well as the Ministry of Education, approved her appointment as full professor, and she continued to have a successful career until the late 1940s (Stan, 2010b 247-54). In our opinion, the accusations launched by Professor Lacea were mostly motivated by peer envy and gender bias, especially as Mrs. Constantinescu-Bagdât had impressive results during her Western university studies. In his turn, Professor Lacea had also studied in the West, more precisely in Munich, Leipzig and Paris and even held some secondary diplomatic position in the French capital around the end of the Great War. The fact that Mrs. Constantinescu-Bagdât was a widow, and equally a staunch feminist militant, could have triggered the attack of Professor Lacea, given that Romanian mentalities remained predominantly traditional in the interwar years.

Sometimes Romanian women studying abroad followed a different trajectory, namely after a degree in their native country they would undertake several research internships in prestigious Western universities or superior schools, and then return to Romania to defend their

PhD, under the coordination of very influential local academic mentors. This was the case of Maria Holban, who graduated with a bachelor's degree from the Faculties of Law and, respectively, of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Bucharest, and then completed four research internships at the *École Nationale des Chartes* and the *École des Hautes Études* in Paris, France, between 1929 and 1939. In the summer of 1939 she defended, in French and with a subject of French history, her doctoral thesis in history, in front of a scientific committee led by the great Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga, obtaining the highest mark (Pippidi, 2001, 377; Roman, 2010, 138-39). In parallel with her research activity, from 1931 to 1948, Maria Holban worked as a substitute and then as a full professor of Latin palaeography at the Archives and Palaeography School in Bucharest. In 1949 Maria Holban became a researcher at the Institute of Universal History in Bucharest (today the "Nicolae Iorga" History Institute of the Romanian Academy), and used the methodological experience she had gained in France to create and coordinate a group of specialists who would publish a series of important volumes of documents on Romanian history, seen from the perspective of foreigners (Roman, 2010, 138-46).

Much like Maria Holban, a few others of her colleagues – who can all be included in the so-called first cluster of relevant Romanian female historians – graduated at the University of Bucharest, where they were noticed and supported by Professor Iorga, then continued to specialize abroad, notably in France, before returning to Romania and either working in research institutes or teaching at undergraduate and graduate level. This was the case of Maria-Matilda Alexandrescu Dersca-Bulgaru (born in 1912), who studied at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy in Bucharest, taking up courses not only in history, but also in sociology and psychology. In 1937-1938 she went to Paris and attended the *École des Langues Orientales* and some courses at the Sorbonne, then, in 1940, she publicly defended her PhD research in front of Nicolae Iorga and other prominent Romanian historians. After Mrs. Dersca-Bulgaru was awarded her doctoral title, she worked in several historical research institutes in Bucharest and also taught for a short period (1946-1952) at the Faculty of History of the Bucharest University (Barbu, 2009, 97-107).

A somewhat similar example to the previous ones was that of Ștefania Cristescu (married Golopenția), a graduate of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy at the University of Bucharest, who received several scholarships between 1932 and 1934 which allowed her to study in France and get another bachelor's degree from the Institute of Ethnology at the Sorbonne. Returning to Romania in the autumn of 1934, Miss Cristescu resumed the activities she had started in 1929 within the renowned sociological institute led by Professor Dimitrie Gusti, and did a lot of fieldwork in various Romanian villages of the Oltenia region, preparing several, very interesting, research papers. She enrolled for a PhD under the supervision of Professor Gusti in the academic

year 1935-1936, but, due to personal and socio-political circumstances, she would not finish her doctoral degree, opting instead to focus on a career as a secondary school teacher (Golopenția, 2013, 184-93). However, through her published works from the 1930's and 1940's, Ștefania Cristescu-Golopenția would influence future generations of Romanian ethnographers and sociologists, and established herself as a role model in this field. (Cuceu, 2013, 211-22).

As a general rule, the majority of the very few women who managed to integrate into the Romanian academic system as university professors in the first half of the 20th century had in their CV's an episode of studies in western universities. In addition to the examples mentioned above, we consider here the case of Vera Myller, who was appointed in 1918 full professor at the University of Iassy, at the Faculty of Sciences, where she was to teach mathematics. When her candidacy to full university professorship (a premiere for Romania) was discussed in the Iassy University Senate, some of the male professors who had to approve it pointed out not only that Vera Myller had obtained a PhD in mathematics from the University of Göttingen in 1906, but also that by appointing her, the University of Iassy would be "as proud, as the University of Paris was proud with Marie Curie and the University of Stockholm with Sofia Lovalis Laya". (Sircuța, 2006, 151). Other Romanian female academics with relevant scientific training in Western universities were Elena Densușianu-Pușcariu and Gabriela Chaborski. Elena Densușianu-Pușcariu had been a graduate and postgraduate student of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Iassy, where in 1899 she had been awarded her doctoral degree in Medicine. She then continued her specialization in Paris, where she worked with and specialized under the guidance of medical personalities such as professors André Victor Cornil, Émile Roux and Ilia Ilici Mecinikov. After a period in which she worked as a doctor in various hospitals in Bucharest and Iassy, in 1920 she was appointed head of the Ophthalmology Clinic in Iassy and professor of ophthalmology at the local Faculty of Medicine. (Ștefan and Firoiu, 1975, 156-60.) For her part, Gabriela Chaborski, a graduate of the Bucharest University (Faculty of Sciences) in 1916, subsequently obtaining a doctorate in chemistry from the University of Geneva in 1919, became in 1920 a university lecturer at the Department of General Chemistry and Electrochemistry in her native Alma Mater (Sircuța, 2006, 151). Also in a foreign university, but this time in Central Europe, studied Elena Eftimiu, who obtained her PhD in Slavic studies in Prague. After the First World War and the unification of Transylvania with Romania, she would be part of the teaching staff of the newly created Romanian University in Cluj (Sircuța, 2006, 152).

In quite a similar fashion, some of the best and more renowned female teachers in Romanian secondary schools also had in their CV's semesters or years of study abroad, typically in France, Switzerland, England or Germany. To illustrate this idea we mention the case of Ana

Conta-Kernbach, Constanța Dunca-Șchiau, Margareta Miller-Verghy or Tereza Stratilescu (Caramelea, 2022, 205-06 and 214-15).

It is therefore obvious that for Romanian women interested in scientific careers and scientific performance in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, holding a masters' or doctoral degree from a foreign university (usually a Western one), was an important asset for obtaining the desired positions in the Romanian labour market. It offered them a much-needed advantage over their male colleagues, who were preferred for the vast majority of positions in the Romanian educational system. However, it is worth pointing out another important fact, namely that, for the most part, these women who have succeeded in academia or in research, also benefited from an influential personal social network, as they were often the daughters, wives or relatives of the Romanian male elite of the times (senior civil servants, politicians, university professors, writers, etc.).

As we progress into the interwar years, the number of Romanian female students studying abroad, either with the direct financial help of their families or with the support of various types of scholarships granted by the Romanian state, would increase exponentially. However, not all of them would put their international academic experiences to good use.

Another common scenario was the one when, upon returning to their native country, many women would accept the traditional social roles of wives and mothers, giving up the idea of a job or career of their own, to which their foreign training would have entitled them to. Often, highly trained young ladies would become the life partners of important local Romanian personalities and, as a consequence, accept to take a step back, permanently or temporarily, using the education they received only in the family circle or in slightly larger socio-cultural contexts, which did not overshadow their husbands.

A typical example in this respect was Mrs. Veturia Ghibu (née Nicolau). Born in Bucharest in 1889, in a rather wealthy family of Transylvanian origin (her father was a merchant), Veturia Nicolau studied for several years at the Conservatory of Music in Bucharest, then continued her academic training in Germany. In 1908, she obtained a physical education teacher diploma from the Voigt Institute in Erfurt, while continuing to study piano. Also in Germany, in Göttingen, she gave her first public piano recital. In 1911, she married Onisifor Ghibu, a well-known pedagogy teacher. After the unification of Transylvania with Romania and the establishment of the Romanian University in Cluj, where Onisifor Ghibu was appointed full professor of pedagogy, Veturia Ghibu settled in the city on the Someș River with her husband and their four children. Although she was offered the opportunity to become an academic herself, namely to hold a piano

chair and teach at the Conservatory of Music in Cluj, Veturia Ghibu refused this prestigious position due to her family's insistence.

However, she continued her musical activity and training, and from 1924 onwards, she also made her debut as a performer of classical music (lieder) and folk music. After a recital with famed composer and violinist George Enescu in 1925, Veturia Ghibu was encouraged to improve her singing. She went abroad again, to Vienna and Paris, where she studied with some personalities of the time. On her return to Romania, she frequently gave recitals in various cities. In 1927, she recorded five albums of songs (the first such recordings ever made in Romania, under the aegis of the Columbia Society). She also had numerous radio appearances after the establishment (in 1928) of Radio Bucharest, directed by Mihail Jora (Cosma, 2019, 140-46).

In her turn, Marioara Blaga, cousin of the prominent Transylvanian poet Lucian Blaga, married the university professor Mihail Șerban, who would become dean and later president of the Academy of Agriculture in Cluj. Miss Blaga had enrolled at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Budapest before the Great War, interrupting her studies in 1916. After the war she briefly frequented the University of Uppsala, before studying and graduating at the Sorbonne, in France. Although she had prepared for a career as a secondary school teacher, she chose not to practise and instead became the most trusted collaborator of her husband – for whom she typed, translated or rephrased various texts. While also caring for her three children, Marioara Șerban (née Blaga) was involved in many local women's associations and charity work. She even tried her hand at politics, as she was elected to the City Committee of the local organization of the National Peasant Party. (Sircuța, 2006, 134; Cosma, 2022, 15).

Regardless of the professional or personal paths that the Romanian women who attended Western universities followed after graduation, it should be noted that these periods of academic learning played a defining role in their lives. Not only did they open up the horizons of the exact sciences or the humanities, but they also familiarized Romanian women with other cultures and mentalities. Usually, the host countries or, more precisely, the host cities where the young ladies have perfected their educational path were fondly remembered and held in high esteem. Nevertheless, critical accents were not lacking from time to time, highlighting the fact that being a female student was still a rather singular status: "I am extremely surprised that in Paris, [the city] with so many students, interesting courses are attended by no more than 20 (at [professor] Vendryès I am the only girl [to attend] besides seven boys)", said Ștefania Cristescu in one of her 1930s letters from Paris (Butoi, 2013, 278).

In an attempt to preserve and develop a hard-won educational status, the *Association of Romanian University Women* was founded in Cluj in 1921. This society intended "to bring together

all women with doctorate or bachelor's degrees living in Romania", regardless of the university where they obtained their diplomas. (Asociația..., 1930, 2). The founder and first president of this association was a Swiss lady of French origin, Alice Jeanne Pierrette Rodrigue, who in 1906 had married a Romanian scientist, botanist Ioan Grințescu. Since 1919, Ioan Grințescu had been appointed full professor at the Romanian University of Cluj and consequently the family settled in this Transylvanian city. Mrs. Alice Grințescu, a PhD holder herself, from the University of Geneva (actually she had been the first woman to obtain a doctorate in Sciences at this university), is a singular example of a westerner who had moved to the East, thus making a reverse academic peregrination. (Cosma, 2022, 18-19). The *Association of Romanian University Women* aimed to strengthen the ties of friendship between "university women of all nations and especially between Romanian University women", and also "to establish and support useful women's works". (Asociația..., 1930, 1). Until 1930, almost 300 Romanian women became members of this society, out of which a small contingent held foreign academic degrees. Besides Alice Grințescu, we encounter here some familiar names, such as Vera Myller or Marioara Șerban (née Blaga), but also other examples of graduates and postgraduates of foreign universities: Ludmila Haidel (PhD holder from the University of Vienna), Viorica Belea (PhD holder from the University of Jena, in Germany), Elena Drăgoescu and Margareta Miller-Verghy (graduates from the University of Geneva), Maria Buia (Medical doctorate holder from the University of Budapest), and so on. (Asociația..., 1930, 5-29.) We can therefore say that the process of feminization of Romanian society, in the sense of the entry of increasingly qualified women into the labour market, gradually accelerated in the first half of the 20th century.

Conclusions

The academic peregrination of young Romanian women to Western universities was an important phenomenon in the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. They often achieved remarkable results in the domains they chose to study, putting their intellectual abilities to good use. They demonstrated that women could also work in fields previously considered 'male-only' or more suited to men. In many cases, Romanian women have actually been amongst the trailblazers for the professional status of women in Europe.

The Romanian female academic peregrination to the West also validates the general pattern of the academic peregrination of Romanian students – namely that, at least until the outbreak of the Second World War, most of these young ladies chose to return home and make a

career in their home country, or start a family. Although we have very little data and statistical research regarding the number of young Romanian women (scholarship holders or not) who successfully completed their university studies abroad between 1880 and 1945, or what was the actual percentage of those who remained in their host country, compared to their country of origin, the known examples show a clear tendency to come back to Romania, as well as the desire of these women to put into practice the knowledge they have acquired and to change the traditional stereotyped images of femininity of the times – which refused them an influential public and scientific standing.

Another relevant characteristic of the Romanian female academic peregrination to be pointed out is that it varied according to the development of the national teaching system. If, at the end of the 19th century and until 1918, a significant number of the Romanian women who chose to pursue university studies went abroad for a full academic pathway – that is from undergraduate courses to the PhD –, as we enter the interwar years, the academic options became more varied and flexible – either only graduate studies (masters) and a PhD abroad, or only specialized studies in the Western universities, that doubled or deepened the bachelor's degrees previously obtained in the Romanian universities or superior schools. This proves in fact that these academic institutions evolved and became more and more welcoming towards local female students as we advance in the 20th century. The quality of academic training for women (and for men also) improved, albeit slowly, and could subject itself to be honourably compared with the Western models.

Last but not least, it should be pointed out that these ladies played the role of unofficial ambassadors, a kind of liaison agents between Romania and the Western countries where they have completed their university training. For example, they would propagate certain ideas that were much debated in the West, but less considered in Romania. This is what Professor Eliza Constantinescu Bagdat did: she was one of the few Romanian representatives of a renowned pacifist association – *L'Union universelle «pour supprimer ce crime, la guerre»* [*The Universal Union "to suppress this crime, the war"*], founded by the French lawyer Henry Demont in 1921. In this quality, in 1934 and 1935, Mrs. Bagdat advocated Demont's pacifist concepts and plans through several public conferences that she gave in Transylvania. Basically, she tried to persuade the Romanian audiences to support the idea of the total elimination of war as a means of resolving world conflicts (Stan, 2010b, 256-57). It should be pointed out that Mrs. Bagdat's activity continued in a somewhat different direction from the research interests that she had developed during her PhD studies in Switzerland and France.

In other cases, Romanian women would try to transpose into Romanian reality various social practices or institutions that they had seen working successfully in Western Europe and that they considered necessary for the local society. Sarmiza Bilcescu-Alimănișteanu, Maria Cutzarida Crătunescu, Marioara Șerban and other highly academically trained women founded or supported numerous and varied associations, which dealt, as a priority, with children in difficult financial or social conditions (such as orphans), young mothers in precarious situations, pupils or students who lacked money for continuing their education or did not have proper accommodation during their high school or university years. It was no accident that these Western-educated women, knowing the value of a proper, competitive schooling, got involved in charitable work aimed at general welfare and the educational progress of the new generations of Romanians. This attitude shows that they wanted to develop their country of origin, thus bridging the gap between East and West. To conclude, further detailed studies are needed in order to fully understand and evaluate the role played by these women in transforming Romania into a modern, truly European state.

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