

## Reflections on the Prague Conference: “Gendering Science: Women and Men Producing Knowledge”<sup>1</sup>

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Six historians of science and technology from the U.S.<sup>2</sup> (the largest delegation after that of the host country—the Czech Republic<sup>3</sup>) joined participants from 18 countries at this international conference, held on 4-6 June 2015. A group travel grant from NSF-STS,<sup>4</sup> enabled

<sup>1</sup> See the conference program at <http://en.genderaveda.cz/218-gender-science/past-conferences/gendering-science-2015>, which includes speaker names, titles, affiliations, abstracts, as well as information on the sponsoring organizations.

<sup>2</sup> In alphabetical order: Pnina G. Abir-Am, Brandeis; Marilyn Bailey Ogilvie, University of Oklahoma; Amy Bix, Iowa State University; Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, University of Minnesota; Barbara Louis, University of Minnesota; and Donald Opitz, DePaul. Margaret W. Rossiter, Cornell; and Joy Harvey, Independent Scholar who were also on the program, but could not travel for medical reasons. (Both have since made good progress in recovery.) Further reflections by these, among other, participants will be posted on the conference website by Donald L. Opitz, who, together with Margaret W. Rossiter, has kindly commented on a previous draft of these reflections. For details on the conference's plenary session and plans for the upcoming ICHST in Rio in 2017 see <http://hssonline.org/resources/publications/newsletter/October-2015>.

<sup>3</sup> The speakers from the host country included the Chairperson of the local organizing committee: Milada Sekyrkova, Libuse Heczkova, Milena Josefovicova, and Eva Kalivodova, all of the Charles University in Prague; as well as Katerina Cidlinska, Marcela Linkova, Sona Strbanova, (a former president of the European Society for the History of Science) and Katerina Zabrodska, all of the Czech Academy of Sciences (see note 1 for their topics). Most of the Czech speakers addressed historical and contemporary issues of gender and science in their country, further revealing a vibrant local community of scholars in gender and women's studies. The largest delegations after the Czech Republic and the USA arrived from Austria, France, and Germany.

<sup>4</sup> NSF-STS award (no. 1539767, see [http://nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD\\_ID=1539767](http://nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD_ID=1539767))

the participants from the U.S. to present their recent scholarship, contemplate transatlantic collaborations, and even lecture in additional European sites. Such a tool deserves to be better known since it is not only indispensable for ensuring the participation of U.S. historians of science at international conferences, especially those whose institutions do not cover such travel, those who work as “independent scholars,” and those who are in transitions of all kinds, but also because it requires a certain amount of coordination among the participants, especially those who may serve as PIs. Furthermore, the European Union’s policy of highlighting intra-European cooperation, has further reduced the opportunities for transatlantic collaboration. NSF may wish to address this situation more systematically, especially since European approaches to gender equality are of great interest for scholars in the U.S.<sup>5</sup>

[gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD\\_ID=1539767](http://nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD_ID=1539767)) covered the travel costs for the six U.S. participants. (Program Director: Frederick Kronz; PI: Donald L. Opitz). My own experience with prior difficulties in ensuring the participation of U.S. historians of science at **another recent international conference** was instrumental in locating this group travel grant as an optimal solution for all the U.S. participants at the Prague conference.

<sup>5</sup> For the European Union's various initiatives on gender equality, see the Prague presentation of Anne-Sophie Godfroy, “Measuring and Monitoring Gender Equality in the Academia: A Comparative Approach of Recent European Gender Equality Plans,” which drew attention to the vast difference between institutional adoption of various gender equality plans, “tool kits,”

The Prague conference was organized by the International Commission on the History of Women and Gender in Science, Technology and Medicine.<sup>6</sup> This Commission has co-sponsored several biennial conferences since its foundation at the 16th International Congress for History of Science and Technology (ICHST), held in Bucharest in 1981, when Margaret W. Rossiter was elected as its first President.<sup>7</sup> The 2015 conference was held in the Carolinum,

indicators, and methodologies; and the occurrence of structural changes needed for gender equality to occur. See also [http://ec.europa.eu/research/swafs/pdf/pub\\_gender\\_equality/structural-changes-workshop-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/swafs/pdf/pub_gender_equality/structural-changes-workshop-report_en.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> This Commission promotes international cooperation in the history of women and gender in science, technology, and medicine by holding every two years quadrennial symposia in various countries, e.g. Paris, 2011; Syros, Greece, 2007; Prague, 2003; and Cambridge, U.K., 1999, in addition to meetings which coincide with the quadrennial meetings of ICHST. Past Commission Presidents and their periods of service are: Margaret Walsh Rossiter, (1981-89) the late Éva Vámos of Hungary (1989-1997), Ida Stamhuis of Holland (1997-2005), Annette Vogt of Germany (2005-2013), and Maria Rentetzi of Greece. (2013-)

<sup>7</sup> On the early days of this Commission see Daryl Haftner, “International Conference on the Role of Women in the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine... Veszprem, Hungary, August 15-19, 1983,” *Technology and Culture*, vol. 26, (April 1985) p. 262-267; and Sally Gregory Kohlstedt's reflections on the Commission's website. Founding members of the Commission from the U.S. include Margaret W. Rossiter, (a former Editor of *ISIS* and *Osiris*) Sally G. Kohlstedt (a former HSS President), Daryl Haftner (a former SHOT President), Joy Harvey, and Pnina G. Abir-Am, the latter two as doctoral students. All of the above continue to take part in the Commission meetings, including the Prague 2015 meeting.

## Reflections on the Prague Conference, cont.

([www.prague.net/carolinum](http://www.prague.net/carolinum)) a historic building of Charles University, the oldest (f. 1348) and largest university in the Czech Republic, which co-sponsored the conference together with the Czech Academy of Sciences and the Czech National Centre for Gender and Science.

The 2015 conference's theme sought to highlight relationships of collaboration and mentorship across genders, while extending the WGS scholarship beyond an earlier emphasis upon retrieving long-neglected contributions of women to science. Both themes happily co-existed in the program, further suggesting that future collective volumes inspired by this conference may well include a combination of these themes. Due to the prevalence of parallel sessions, as well as for reasons of space, only a fraction of the topics presented in Prague are mentioned below (see note 2 for additional sources). The session on women scientists in exile, chaired by Carola Sachse of Vienna University, stood out for me for both professional and personal reasons. Sonja Walch of the University of Vienna examined the role of war, gender, and emigration in tropical botany while comparing the exquisite case studies of Mona Lisa Steiner of Vienna and Marie-Helene Sachet of Paris who emigrated to Manila and Washington, DC respectively. Barbara Louis, a recent PhD from the University of Minnesota-Minneapolis, compared the Viennese émigrés

Elsa Leichter and Gerda Schulman, whose socialist ideology and Jewish ethnicity compelled them to flee after the Nazi annexation, and who managed to carve for themselves new professional spaces in American social work, specializing in group therapy and family therapy, respectively. Christine von Oertzen of MPI-Berlin provided extensive evidence to the effect that German émigré women were committed professionals with real careers to manage, salvage, or lose, as well as major social responsibilities in supporting family members, often women relatives, especially mothers.<sup>8</sup> The session concluded with a lively discussion to which I contributed the suggestion that the émigré sister scientists Marguerite and Marthe Vogt, who pursued remarkable careers in the U.S. and U.K., respectively, be also researched in a comparative manner.<sup>9</sup>

The reason for my profound excitement at this session pertained not only to its novel case studies and analytical boldness but also to a gratifying sense of vindication. As a student, I protested

<sup>8</sup> Based on her recent book, *Science, Gender, and Internationalism: Women's Academic Networks* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Marguerite Vogt was included in my presentation, "Women of the Phage Group" at the HSS Annual Meeting in Washington DC in 2007, as part of a session marking the 25th anniversary of Margaret W. Rossiter's first volume in her trilogy on *American Women in Science* (1982, 1995, 2012). The Prague conference may thus stimulate a potential transatlantic collaboration by revealing that Helga Satzinger of the U.K. (see below) is now interested in both sisters.

the lack of inclusion of émigré women scientists at a Smithsonian conference in the early 1980s (that protest did not endear me to the HSS elders, who were quick to conclude that I was a "trouble maker," a label which is not helpful to a junior scholar, yet somehow I survived it, though some might say barely so....) It is hoped that the superb session on women scientists in exile will soon become a special issue in a leading journal, or so it seemed at an impromptu "business meeting" with these speakers during a conference-sponsored lunch.

The session on cross-gender collaboration and mentorship which I organized and chaired was also rumored to have been a great session, despite general sadness at the absence of projected speakers Margaret Rossiter, Joy Harvey, and Helga Satzinger.<sup>10</sup> Their name plates to my right and to my left prompted me to publicly lament the absence of these pioneering scholars and valued colleagues. Marilyn Bailey Ogilvie's passionate presentation of the American

<sup>10</sup> On Rossiter see notes 7 & 9. Harvey is known for her *Almost a Man of Genius, Clemence Royer, Feminism, and 19th Century Science*, (1997) and together with Marilyn Bailey Ogilvie, for their biographical dictionary on women in science, (1999) which we put on display at the conference. Harvey is currently completing a book on French-trained American physician Mary Putnam Jacobi, while bravely and steadily recovering from a stroke. For Satzinger's illuminating perspective on gender hierarchy in German science see her *Difference and Heredity* (Cologne: Bohlau 2009) which is to appear soon in English translation with Palgrave.

## Reflections on the Prague Conference, cont.

ornithologist Margaret Morse Nice and her various, women and men collaborators, based on a book in progress, elicited many questions from the audience. Sona Strbanova's (see photo) on the British biochemist Marjorie Stephenson, one of the first women Fellows of the Royal Society, was also based on a forthcoming book. Stephenson's rare capacity for reparteeing with J.B.S Haldane in the mid-1920s so impressed a young J.T. Edsall (1902-2002) that he made a point of assisting women scientists long before affirmative action became the law of the land. Pnina G. Abir-Am (see photo) contrasted the careers of women molecular biologists at UC-Berkeley in the key decade of the 1970s, when women were hired in larger numbers as a result of the 1972 affirmative action legislation. The talk further inquired why male mentorship, which proved decisive in career making, was more available to "trailing spouse" Elizabeth Blackburn (who would share the 2009 Nobel Prize for the discovery of telomerase) than to unattached Ellen Daniell, a woman scientist who absorbed the independent spirit of the 1960s, but in the absence of such mentorship, joined the "leaking pipeline," further providing telling insights into the much debated underrepresentation of women in science.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> For further details see Pnina G. Abir-Am, "Women Scientists of the 1970s: An Ego-Histoire of a Lost Generation" in *Writing about Lives in Science, Auto/biography, Gender, and Genre*, eds.: Paola Govoni and Alice Z. Franceschi. (Gottingen: V&R Unipress, 2014) 223-261.



Left photo: Ida Stamhuis lectures in the final session; center photo: overview of Aula Minor during the opening session with Sona Strbanova showing her slides; right photo: Pnina Abir-Am lectures in the opening session. Photos courtesy of Nadezhda Strakova.

Helga Satzinger's (University College, London) paper on the substantial career opportunities for women technicians in the 19th and 20th century German science, stirred great interest in the audience when I read it, in her absence, as part of another session, which also included stimulating papers on wo/men geneticists and biochemists by Nurit Kirsh (Open University, Israel) and Robert Freedman, (Warwick University, U.K.) respectively. The concluding session focused on gender and statistics, including a comprehensive study of Czech women scientists since the 19th century by Milada Sekyrkova (note 3) who combined quantitative and qualitative methods;

a study of gender in Dutch statistical practices by Ida Stamhuis (Free University, Amsterdam, note 6, see photo below); and a study of a collaborative couple of émigré statisticians Emma and Vladimir Woytinsky, by Annette Vogt, (MPI-Berlin, note 6), which *Creative Couples in the Sciences* would have welcomed, had it been available by 1996.

The formal sessions, coffee breaks, a great lunch hosted by Charles University, a superb banquet in a historic Prague cafe, and a guided tour to the American Women's Club, (a center for progressive education and civic activism for Czech women since the 19th century) provided plenty of opportunities for professional interaction.

## Reflections on the Prague Conference, cont.

Particularly memorable was a group of French doctoral students who shared with us their struggle to create a community of gender-related research at Centre A. Koyré in Paris.<sup>12</sup> Still, the all important topics of the analytical distinctions between women's studies and gender studies in science, as well as strategies for mainstreaming both in the wider context of new scholarship in the history of STEM, did not receive sufficient attention; it is hoped that these aspects will be at the center of attention at the next meeting of this Commission at the upcoming ICHST in Rio, in 2017.

The Prague conference had a “spin-off” role by enabling participants from the U.S. to lecture in additional European sites, since it is much easier for European colleagues to justify a guest talk by a U.S. scholar who can be brought from another European city.<sup>13</sup> The Prague conference also enabled us to get acquainted with the cultural treasures of the host city, much remembered for the fateful days of August 1968. I was part of a small group which toured the 14th century

<sup>12</sup> The students included Valérie Burgos, Dalia Deias, Juliette Lancel, and Isabelle Lémonon. See the “Femmes et Savoirs” webpage is: <http://semdochak.hypotheses.org/category/programme-des-seminaires/seminaire-femmes-savoirs>

<sup>13</sup> For example, after the Prague conference I gave talks in Madrid and Paris, sponsored by conference colleagues Maria J. Santesmases, Isabelle Lemonon, and Anne-Sophie Godfroy, respectively. Other conference speakers were similarly able to give talks in other European sites.



Terezin Memorial Museum. Left: a commemorative statue; center: literature on Terezin in World War II still untranslated into English; right: the children's opera.

Betlemska chapel, climbed all the way to the Prague castle via the famed Charles Bridge, and enjoyed a farewell sailing under this majestic bridge. Everywhere I went I could not avoid thinking of Alice Teichova<sup>14</sup> (1920-2015) and her husband, the historian of science Mikulas Teich, who first introduced me to the spirit of Prague when, as a junior scholar seeking residential proximity to the Cambridge University Library, they took me as a sitter of their Prague-imbued house. Last but not least, some of us also managed to visit Terezin,<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> “Leading economic historian of Central Europe,” obituary in *The Times* (London) May 27, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> The 70th anniversary of Terezin’s liberation was just marked in Boston by a performance of “Liberation: New Works on Freedom by Internationally Renowned

a large, village-style museum about an hour north of Prague, which commemorates a concentration camp (in)famous for its artistic productions, even a children’s opera. To our surprise, much of the literature on Terezin in Czech and other European languages remains untranslated into English. In conclusion, Prague remains of interest to historians of science and will soon host the European Society for the History of Science meeting with the theme “Science and Power, Science as Power” on 22-24 Sept 2016.

Poets,” sponsored by the Terezin Music Foundation, at the Coolidge Corner Theatre in Brookline, MA on November 17, 2015.