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Feminizing the university: the mobilities, careers, and contributions of early female academics in the University of Cambridge, 1926-1955

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Abstract

This article examines the role of early female academics at the University of Cambridge in the production and dissemination of knowledge between 1926 and 1955. A statistical comparison of women's use of academic leave of absence with that of their male colleagues reveals that, across disciplines, women were less integrated into (inter)national knowledge networks and thus less visible in their epistemic communities than men because women focused their academic leaves more on research, rarely attended conferences, travelled overseas less often than men, and went more frequently to destinations within Europe than the United States as the new economic hegemon. Biographical case studies of these early female academics demonstrate the importance, variously, of their upper middle class background, academic excellence, and familial and non-familial patronage in developing their careers, overcoming multiple hurdles, and producing intellectual contributions of equal quality to that of their male peers. Conceptually, this article calls for the inclusion of academic travelers from other disciplines than geography into feminist histories of geographical knowledge and argues that rather than stereotyping gender differences, greater comparative research on the experiences of female and male academics is needed in order to understand the mechanisms of gender inequality within the university.

Key Words: academic mobility, knowledge production, university, feminization, gender, geography

Introduction

Since 1870 Cambridge has passed from being a second-rate academy to one of the world's leading universities; and the arrival of women has been an essential feature of that transformation (Brooke 1993, 330).

In histories of European universities such as Cambridge (founded in 1209), the presence of female students and academics is a fairly recent phenomenon; the admission of women to such institutions typically began only in the late nineteenth century (Anderson 2004).

Women's growing enrollment has increased their presence on university campuses ever since, but their representation as students and members of faculty still varies significantly with respect to country, discipline, and career stage (European Commission 2016). Women remain highly underrepresented at the rank of full professor, comprising (in 2013) 31 percent of those positions in the United States and (in 2014/15) 23 percent in the United Kingdom (HESA 2015, Table 2; Snyder, de Brey, and Dillow 2016, Table 315.20). They also tend to face greater barriers than men both in participating in transnational academic mobility and in hosting international colleagues at their home institutions (Jöns 2011). As a consequence of these obstacles, women's opportunities for building the cultural capital and social connections that would enhance their academic work and professional networks are potentially more limited than those of their male colleagues (Etzkowitz et al. 2000).

This article aims to contribute to debates about the professional standing of women in science and scholarship (e.g., Zuckerman and Cole 1975; Rossiter 1982; Zuckerman et al. 1991; Etzkowitz et al. 2000; Panayotidis and Stortz 2015) by examining the historical origins of women's participation in the creation and circulation of scholarly knowledge in universities. As a case study, the paper explores the role of women in the transformation of

the University of Cambridge from an ancient center of learning, characterized by a largely sedentary late-nineteenth-century academic community, into a modern research university, sustained since the 1920s by an increasingly mobile academic workforce (Heffernan and Jöns 2013). Drawing on archival research, the paper's analysis is guided by three research questions: 1) How did women's academic leaves of absence compare to those of their male colleagues? 2) Where did female academics travel in comparison to their male peers, and how did this travel shape the geographies of knowledge production, circulation, and transfer? 3) What personal and professional circumstances enabled and supported the career development of early female academics, and how did women's contributions to knowledge differ from those of men?

This study is framed by conceptual ideas of feminist geography and science studies that promote contextualized and differentiated analyses of diverse gendered practices (e.g., Harding 1986; Haraway 1988; Rose 1995; Pratt and Yeoh 2003). Accordingly, the paper uses the historically constructed idea of male and female (Butler 1990) to expose some of the striking inequalities women experienced in realizing their academic potential during the early and middle decades of the twentieth century, even when their intellectual performance was equal to that of their male colleagues. As a conceptual contribution to feminist debates, this article calls for more comparative studies of women and men in order to generate a deeper understanding of gender inequalities, to avoid stereotyping the life-course trajectories of women or men, and to induce further social change in the academy (and beyond).

(Fe)male knowledge production

In addressing the importance of gender in processes of academic knowledge production, I bring together, in what follows, three bodies of research in geography and science studies that examine, first, the relationship between academic travel and knowledge production; second,

the contributions of women travelers to scientific and geographical knowledge; and, third, the feminization of the university.

Academic travel and knowledge production

Geographers and historians of science have stressed the significant role of various forms of spatial mobility (including exploration, learning, pilgrimage, and trade) in the production and dissemination of scientific knowledge (e.g., Gebhardt 1986; Livingstone 2003; Meusburger et al. 2010). Whether supporting the interests of empire, commerce, religion, literature, or science (Driver 2001), such journeys helped to legitimize different forms of power (Gebhardt 1986). Systematic processes of mobilization emerging from scientific “centers of calculation” (Latour 1987, 239), such as universities, have enabled Europeans, since early modern times, to study and to dominate foreign places at a distance, thus underlining the inextricable relationship between knowledge and power (Foucault 1977). Women’s underrepresentation in travels of this sort, especially in the circular travels of researchers and academics, may partially explain their prevailing exclusion from networks of power well into the twentieth century (Jöns 2011).

The transition from largely amateur “scientific travelers”, who were either self-funded or supported by specialized scientific societies such as the French *Service des Missions* (Heffernan 1994) and the British Royal Geographical Society (Driver 2001), to professionalized “travelling scientists” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Gebhardt 1986, 112) coincided with the professionalization of university-based research (Jöns 2008) and the establishment, from the 1880s onwards, of regular research sabbaticals in American universities (Eells 1962). Whereas recent studies have shown that both transnational migration for academic positions and circular academic travel from a home institution were pivotal for the proliferation and globalization of the research university in the

early twentieth century (e.g., Charle 2004; Jöns 2008; Kim 2009; Pietsch 2010; Heffernan and Jöns 2013), the engagement of a growing number of women in these processes has scarcely been assessed (Pietsch 2013, 79–82; Panayotidis and Stortz 2015). This paper seeks to address that lacuna by focusing specifically on the mobilities, careers, and intellectual contributions of early female academics.

Women explorers and scientific travelers

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, European cultures of exploration (overwhelmingly masculine) were informed by conflicting discourses concerning the nature and value of knowledge produced by different individuals—natural historians and adventurous travelers—and by different means: sedentary scholarship or mobile, in-the-field observation (Driver 2001; Keighren, Withers, and Bell 2015; Bond 2016). Late-twentieth-century debates about the inclusion in disciplinary histories of women travelers as legitimate producers of scientific and geographical knowledge added yet another contested dimension to the epistemic quarrels that have characterized the historiography of geography (Domosh 1991; Stoddart 1991).

Subsequent feminist studies advocating wider than traditional approaches to such historiography have revealed the significant yet ambivalent contributions of women to the geographical ordering of the nineteenth-century world, especially as part of the scramble for Africa (e.g., Bell 1993; Blunt 1994; McEwan 2000) and along the North American frontier (e.g., Heffernan and Medlicot 2002; Morin 2008).

McEwan (1998, 216) has usefully pointed out that, apart from the pioneering female scientific travelers “during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, middle-class women often became the unpaid ‘invisible assistants’ to scientific husbands or fathers in the home, because they were barred from universities”. Only very few of these women conducted their own fact-finding missions, as is evidenced by the applications for travel grants provided by the French

Service des Missions from the 1840s to 1914 (Heffernan 1994). Traditional gender roles at the time meant that women were expected either to marry and focus on social reproduction, household labor, and care responsibilities, or to live a life of religious seclusion (Dyhouse 1995). Yet, in the nineteenth century, significant cultural differences in attitudes towards women's life trajectories, as exemplified by the early women's suffrage movements in the United States and Britain, gave rise to distinct geographies of gender inequalities, especially in regard to women's education and scientific pursuits (Anderson 2004; Kölbl-Ebert 2007).

The feminization of the university

Women's access to European universities from the 1860s onwards was encouraged by a number of related processes: the increasing provision of formal schooling for girls; the growing movement for women's rights; the presence of female American students in European universities; and the emergence of "secular school teaching as a genuinely new profession" for women (Anderson 2004, 256). Britain became one of the most progressive European countries with respect to the inclusion of female university students after eight colleges for women were founded in Oxford and Cambridge between 1869 and 1893. Women were, however, awarded university degrees much earlier in the University of London system (since 1877) and in the newly founded civic universities than they were in Oxford (1920) and Cambridge (1948) (Anderson 2004), where instruction in women colleges mostly reinforced patriarchal culture and traditional family roles throughout the interwar period (McClellan 2015). Early female students were often from higher middle-class backgrounds than male students, and we may suppose this reflected the degree of self-confidence, financial backing, and cultural capital necessary for women to tackle the many obstacles to entering higher education (Anderson 2004). Early female academics also required the support of existing scholars (both male and female) in order to succeed in an academic world full of prejudices

and discrimination towards women and other minorities from non-traditional backgrounds (Rossiter 1982; Dyhouse 1995; McClellan 2015).

In conjunction with historical and sociological studies about the role of women in the university (e.g., Zuckerman and Cole 1975; Rossiter 1982; Dyhouse 1995; Etzkowitz et al. 2000; Panayotidis and Stortz 2015), geographers have examined some of these processes in their own discipline, including a focus on women's representation, experiences, contributions, and struggles in American and British universities (e.g., Zelinsky 1973; McDowell 1979; Zelinsky et al. 1982; McDowell and Peake 1990; Monk 1998; Sack 2004; Keighren 2010; Maddrell 2015; Kaplan and Mapes 2016; Maddrell et al. 2016) and across different employment sectors (e.g., Monk 2003; 2004; Maddrell 2008; 2009; DeLyser 2011). Aiming to develop this work and the research on (female) scientific and scholarly travel, this paper adds a gender-sensitive and cross-disciplinary comparative and geographical analysis of one institution over three decades to studies of the wider relationship between academic travel and knowledge production in the university.

Sources

This study combines traditional biographical archival sources, including personal papers of female academics held in the Cambridge University Archives and those of two colleges—King's and Girton—with newspaper articles, obituaries, biographical memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society, and other published biographical and autobiographical documents. Beyond these materials, it also uses a non-traditional archival source: a longitudinal data set containing all applications for leave of absence by Cambridge University Teaching Officers (professors, readers, university lecturers, and university demonstrators).

In developing a comparative analysis of the geographical trajectories of Cambridge academics, I have drawn on these original records for the period between 1926–27, when

women were first appointed to academic positions at Cambridge, and 1954–55, which date marks the end of a post-war decade that saw substantial changes in academic travel as a consequence of decolonization and the proliferation of commercial air travel (Jöns 2008). These records of applications for leave of absence, as documented in the minute books of the university's General Board of the Faculties, reflect a policy initiated in 1885–86, when professors and readers (and, from 1926, all Cambridge University Teaching Officers) were obliged to apply for leave of absence during full term time, mainly to ensure their presence and thus greater availability to their students and colleagues.

Even if this longitudinal dataset does not represent all academic travel from Cambridge but only that exceeding the strict regulations of residence during full term time, it does cover all granted absences from Cambridge for more than two nights per week during full term, granted research leaves of one to three terms and all granted periods of absence of over three months—the duration of the long vacation during the summer (Jöns 2008). This dataset therefore allows for a novel comparative perspective on the frequency, motives, and destinations of overseas academic travel undertaken by male and female academics across all represented disciplines and over a period of three decades.

Women in the University of Cambridge

Women began to play a larger role in the University of Cambridge after the 1870s, when the first two women-only colleges of Girton (1869) and Newnham (1871) had been established and women were informally allowed to attend lectures (Brooke 1993). Female students took examinations after 1881 but did not become full members of the university with degree status until 1948, an exclusion that had, until then, reflected their lack of right to vote in university affairs (McWilliams Tullberg 1998). A consequence of that policy was that the share of female full-time students stagnated in Cambridge (1900–01: 10 percent; 1934–35: 9 percent)

and thus fell behind Oxford (1934–35: 18 percent) and the national average for British universities (1900: 16 percent; 1930: 27 percent; see Sutherland 1994, 173; Dyhouse 1995, 17, 248–49).

Female academics had begun to lecture in the women's colleges but were first appointed as Cambridge University Teaching Officers in 1926 as part of a major university reform launched by the Royal Commission on Oxford and Cambridge of 1919 (McWilliams Tullberg 1998). A key aim of this reform was to strengthen research in order to catch up with the thriving research universities in Germany and the United States. This policy included tapping into new talent reserves by increasing the access to university of poor students and employing women lecturers (Brooke 1993). In 1926, the University of Cambridge more than doubled its number of academic staff by recruiting 125 male and ten female university lecturers (7 percent women). By 1955, the number of female academics had risen to thirty, but their share stagnated at about 5 percent and was much higher among lecturers than among more senior ranks (Table 1). The first female Oxbridge professor, Dorothy Garrod (1892–1968), was appointed to Cambridge's Disney Professorship of Archaeology only in 1939 (Callander 2004), a fact that suggests women were merely tolerated at Cambridge in comparison with other UK universities where their representation had risen nationally from 5 percent in 1912–13 to 12 percent in 1951 (Rendel 1980).

[Table 1 about here]

In the 1950s, almost two thirds of female lecturers at Cambridge worked either in the fields of language and cultural studies or in the classical fieldwork disciplines of geography, archaeology, and anthropology; in both of these wider subject areas, they represented 13 percent of all Cambridge University Lecturers respectively (Table 2). These various fields of

inquiry emphasized humanistic learning compatible with female socialization, allowed for a focus on British research topics (even if this may have restricted women academically), and offered role models such as Garrod who, according to Callander and Smith (2007), actively promoted the academic careers of women. Apart from mathematics, women academics in the natural and technical sciences were much more underrepresented in Cambridge than in any other UK university (Rendel 1980). In the so-called hard sciences, women faced the challenge “of reconciling accepted codes of social etiquette with masculine traditions of academic conduct” (Gould 2001, 164) and remained largely excluded because existing social codes meant that their presence in laboratories and lectures “placed a great restraint on [male] language and behaviour” (McWilliams Tullberg 1998, 178).

[Table 2 about here]

Academic leave of absence and overseas travel

A key innovation of the 1926 reforms at Cambridge was the introduction of periods of research, or sabbatical, leave. Such leave freed academics, at regular intervals, from teaching and administrative duties and provided them with the opportunity for uninterrupted research and any travelling that this might require (Jöns 2008). This concept, previously established in U.S. universities (Eells 1962), turned travel into a key research strategy across disciplines at Cambridge, thus transforming a relatively sedentary academic community into an increasingly mobile workforce, especially after WWII (Heffernan and Jöns 2013).

From 1926 to 1955, female Cambridge academics across disciplines took academic leave of absence proportionally to their representation among University Teaching Officers (Table 3), suggesting that they were not systematically disadvantaged by the institution in comparison with men. That women spent many more of their leaves as research sabbaticals

than did their male colleagues (75 versus 44 percent) indicates that they were highly dedicated, research-active individuals. By comparison, male academics used more of their academic leaves for the epistemologically and socially important practices of conference travel, invited lectures, visiting appointments, and advisory work. Men were, thus, more integrated into personal academic networks than were women and perhaps also more confident in using academic leave for a greater variety of work tasks than simply research (Table 4).

Conference travel was most important in the male-dominated physical and biological sciences (Heffernan and Jöns 2013), but strikingly, over the three decades surveyed here (1926–55), only two women, both from language and cultural studies, and 161 men across all represented disciplines at Cambridge took leave of absence during full term time to attend a conference (4 versus 18 percent). This first remarkable difference between female and male academic practices in the middle decades of the twentieth century might offer one explanation for why women’s contributions to knowledge production have long been overlooked in many disciplines (for geography, see the debate between Domosh 1991 and Stoddart 1991). This is because women’s relative absence at conferences and among presenters of conference papers reduced the visibility of their research findings in the epistemic community and limited women’s opportunities for networking that would also have made their work more widely known, for example, through informal discussions and subsequent interactions such as invited lectures and research collaborations.

[Table 3 about here]

[Table 4 about here]

The second-largest difference between the academic leaves of female and male Cambridge academics was that women travelled overseas much less frequently than their male colleagues (53 versus 73 percent). This variation is evident not only in disciplines that demonstrate the highest shares of overseas travel but also reveals a genuine gender effect across disciplines because, even in the social sciences and the humanities, in which most women worked, they travelled abroad far less frequently than did their male peers (Table 5). Notably, many more women than men focused on British research topics for which overseas travel was not necessary because the work could be done in Cambridge and elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

One explanation for the strong underrepresentation of women in conference and overseas travel may be that wider discourses about the social complications and perceived dangers of women travelling abroad alone had socialized these early female academics in ways similar to those discourses that commented critically upon the endeavors of women travelers in the nineteenth century (McEwan 2000). It is also likely that women were more place-bound in their academic work simply as a result of ongoing and potential future care responsibilities; these women thus experienced challenges similar to those of other working women during the twentieth century, not only in terms of daily commuting, as Pratt and Hanson (1993) have revealed, but also in regard to circular academic mobility (Jöns 2011).

Moreover, women seemed to have received fewer invitations to conferences both in the United Kingdom and overseas because of their lower visibility in the research community as a consequence of fewer conference visits and the difficult integration of women into male-dominated academic networks, complicated by multiple tensions arising from male professors supporting female colleagues, or academic friendships between individuals of the same sexual orientation more generally (for the Austin Robinson–Joan Robinson–Richard Kahn triad, see Aslanbeigui and Oakes 2009, 51–87), as well as the effects of prevailing

discourses about a lower quality of female scholarship (Harding 1986; Traweek 1999; Etzkowitz et al. 2000; Whaley 2003). As this paper's first biographical case study shows, funding for conference and overseas travel was also less often readily available to women—a fact that further hampered their acquisition of professionally relevant social and cultural capital with which to advance their careers.

[Table 5 about here]

From 1926 to 1955, seventeen female Cambridge academics, across all disciplines, embarked on twenty-five overseas journeys. Female and male Cambridge academics targeted to the same extent destinations within the British Empire and Commonwealth (20 versus 22 percent) and other international destinations outside of Europe and the United States (12 percent respectively), but their travels to the contemporary centers of knowledge production varied substantially. Women's overseas journeys went more often than men's to mainland Europe (44 versus 33 percent) and far less to the United States (24 versus 38 percent), a fact that reflects their subject-specific specialties and their lower propensity for long-distance travel (Figure 1). This third striking difference between the academic leaves of women and men at Cambridge illustrates that women did not participate to the same extent in the mobilization of valuable expertise and networks through visits to the emerging hegemonic universities in the United States—visits that often impacted positively on men's career progression (Jöns 2016).

Moreover, the strong underrepresentation of women in the natural and technical sciences meant that future generations of women had to struggle with the inverse effects of cumulative processes of transatlantic academic mobility and collaboration because they remained largely excluded from growing Anglo-American friendship networks among men in

the techno sciences (Jöns, Mavroudi, and Heffernan 2015). In contrast, the greater presence of early female academics in the social sciences and the humanities arguably shaped the academic cultures of these disciplines and thus enabled a more rapid feminization and smoother integration of women into (inter)national academic networks (Jöns 2011).

The striking underrepresentation of early female academics in conference and overseas travels, as well as in journeys to the United States—the new economic and academic hegemon of the 20th century—, can thus be regarded both as an outcome of and contribution to women’s “accumulation of disadvantage” (Etzkowitz et al. 2000, 91). In Etzkowitz et al.’s (2000, 91–95, 157–77) study, this phenomenon is explained by different traditional female and male socialization experiences, traced through the doctoral training and academic careers of late 20th century female U.S. academics, and linked to women’s “more exclusionary and tokenistic practices in their collegial relationships” at the (inter)departmental university level—instead of the transnational level—because these “are associated with barriers to performance, even when no differences in human capital exist” (Etzkowitz et al. 2000, 158).

[Figure 1 about here]

Careers and contributions

Analyzing the biographical background of all early female academic travelers from Cambridge reveals a diversity of circumstances that brought them into their positions and enabled their overseas travels. These circumstances can be illustrated by the biographies of three women whose life-course trajectories exemplify three main sociocultural and economic advantages that facilitated the academic careers and contributions of early female academics in Cambridge, namely a) an upper middle-class background; b) familial and non-familial academic patronage, and c) exceptional educational achievement. Although space here does

not allow for an in-depth comparison with male counterparts, it is clear that male academics required similarly well-situated social backgrounds (Jarausch 1983) and personal networks (Jöns 2016) but often received more recognition, faced fewer hurdles and less discrimination, and had to grapple with fewer competing obligations during their education and careers than women (e.g., Rossiter 1982; 1993; Dyhouse 1995; Etzkowitz et al. 2000; Whaley 2003; Jöns 2011; Panayotidis and Stortz 2015).

The biologist Sidnie Milana Manton (1902–79), appointed as University Demonstrator in Comparative Anatomy in 1927, became the first woman in the University of Cambridge to receive academic leave for overseas travel. She intended to join the Great Barrier Reef expedition of 1928–29 (sponsored by the Royal Geographical Society) for four months in 1929 “to work on the feeding mechanisms, food and habits of the Crustacea on the reef and in the plankton”.ⁱ In 1928, her colleague James Alfred Steers, at the time a Lecturer in Geography, had accompanied the same expedition (thus confirming the fact that Cambridge’s new research leave scheme enabled the participation of both male and female academics in externally organized research missions).ⁱⁱ Yet Steers received twice as much money from Cambridge’s Worts Fund towards his travel expenses for his one-term journey (£100) as did Manton for two terms (£50).ⁱⁱⁱ Ironically, Manton received greater praise for her research contributions; Sir Maurice Yonge, the leader of the expedition, commented that “Sidnie did as much in those few months as the rest of us did in four times that period” (Fryer 1980, 329).

Manton, like many of her female contemporaries at Cambridge, had an upper middle class background that provided her with the necessary cultural capital and financial resources to access university education. She had grown up as the elder daughter of a dental surgeon in London, and her parents instilled an interest in craftsmanship and natural history in her and her sister, Irene (Fryer 1980). To date, Sidnie and Irene are the only sisters who have both

been elected to the Royal Society. Manton's interests were also actively encouraged by school teachers and professors in London and Cambridge; Cambridge Professor J. S. Gardiner played a key role in securing her university appointment in 1927. This non-familial academic patronage was based on outstanding academic achievement that placed her first in her class in zoology (1925), though—doubtless to her frustration—she did not receive the related prize because women were not then officially members of the University of Cambridge (Fryer 1980).

Manton went on to establish an academic career as a renowned zoologist and director of natural sciences at Girton College (1935–42). A few years after her marriage in 1937 to zoologist John Philip Harding (1911–98), who was nine years her junior, she moved to London, where he was employed at the British Museum. Despite the responsibilities of raising their daughter and their adopted son, she took a teaching and research position at King's College London (1942–60), being promoted to Reader in 1949 (Fryer 1980). Manton thus represents a privileged woman, who excelled in her studies and received the necessary support to become one of the early female academics able to combine international research excellence with a dual-career relationship and having children. While raising her own family seemed only possible after she had gained her scientific credentials, this might be one of the reasons why she never received a university chair.

Those women who grew up with academics in their family often benefited from a head start in pursuing an academic career, profiting from role models, encouragement, and easier access to suitable socio-cultural capital, education, research facilities, and academic jobs. Such was the experience of the geographer Margaret Swainson Anderson (1902–52, neé Willis), whose mother Minnie Willis (1871–1931, neé Baldwin) had been a Lecturer in Science at Westfield College, London, before she married in 1897. Anderson, the second of three daughters, was educated at Girton, as were her mother and aunt. After teaching at

Malvern Girls' College and the University of Manchester, she returned to Cambridge in 1928 as a Demonstrator in Geography, became a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society (1928), and spent her first research leave in 1931 travelling in South America to extend her work in plant geography.^{iv}

Anderson had a career break from Cambridge of eleven years following her marriage to Frank Anderson (1902–99), an electrical engineer and non-academic, with whom she lived in Barbados for three years. There she contributed to the foundation of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society and published about birds in Barbados (1935), collaborated in the charting of the harbor with Commander Wynne (1935), and, together with her husband, drew the first road map of the island, in preparation for which they had travelled along every road (1936). Subsequently, the couple raised their daughter in Cambridge, where Anderson delivered short courses in Physical Geography to army cadets during WWII before she resumed her college duties at Girton in 1944.^v Regarded by Professor Frank Debenham “as one the most brilliant students of his Department”,^{vi} she became a part-time Lecturer in Geography in 1948 but sadly died only four years later, just when she was freer from domestic obligations, had recently published the book *Geography of Living Things* in the Teach Yourself Geography series (1951), and wanted to spend more time in college with her students.^{vii}

About every fourth female Cambridge academic who took leave of absence between 1926 and 1955 had been married at some point in her life, a figure corresponding to the low marriage rate of women academics in England at the time (1924: 33 percent; Perrone 1993, 360 cited in Dyhouse 1995, 161). While many female academics, like Manton and Anderson, married after they had built their academic career, others, such as Dorothy Garrod, whose boyfriend had died in WWI, remained unmarried (Callander 2004). These bachelor women sometimes perceived single-sex college life as an attractive alternative lifestyle (Dyhouse

1995) or even as a suitable context for living in a homosexual relationship, which would not otherwise have been possible (Bergland 2008; Adams 2010; McClellan 2015).

The economist Joan Violet Robinson (1903–83, née Maurice) represents those women who lived in a dual-career relationship from the start of their academic careers. In 1926, one year after graduation from Girton College, Cambridge, with a Second Class degree in economics (Aslanbeigui and Oakes 2009), she married fellow economist Austin Robinson (1897–1993), who had been one of her teachers in Cambridge (Harcourt 2004a). The young couple stayed in India for two years, where he worked as a tutor to the ten-year-old Maharajah of Gwalior, before they returned to Cambridge in 1928.^{viii} The Robinsons raised two daughters in Cambridge, where they were both promoted to Reader in Economics in 1949 (Harcourt 2004b). In “a succession unprecedented in British universities”, she later won the competition for the Professorship of Economics that her husband held from 1950 until his retirement in 1965 and continued in this post until her own retirement in 1971.^{ix}

During the 1930s, the Robinsons were part of the Cambridge Circus, a small group of economists who contributed to the Keynesian revolution in discussions with John Maynard Keynes, who sent Joan Robinson and four male economists his book manuscript on *The General Theory* with the request for critical comments in 1935 (Aslanbeigui and Oakes 2009). This special engagement demonstrates Robinson’s outstanding intellectual capability, something that was instrumental for her academic career (she was appointed as Lecturer in Economics at Cambridge in 1938) and most likely made her an attractive partner, friend, and love companion for two fellow Cambridge economists, her husband Austin and Richard Kahn (Aslanbeigui and Oakes 2009).

Robinson became most renowned for promoting Marxist thought in modern economics, a contribution that she developed since reading *Capital* in the spring of 1941 (Harcourt and Kerr 2009) and that is exemplified by the socialist geographies of her travels.

After 1945, she visited Russia, China, North Korea, and Cuba, hoping that these countries would create a society of “co-operation, hard work, mutual respect and affection” in which “the potential of all its citizens would be realized” (Harcourt 2004b, 1). Robinson also maintained a life-long interest in India and, in 1955, held a visiting position at the Delhi School of Economics.^x

While she propagated the view that intellectual women should be treated the same as men, Robinson’s academic achievements did not exempt her from the overt and covert discrimination that female academics experienced at the time (Dyhouse 1995). She once told fellow Cambridge economist Ruth Cohen about an uncomfortable situation at a dinner party in Cambridge during which a distinguished visiting economist had made no effort to talk to her. After a theoretical discussion began, Robinson made a contribution that prompted the visitor to exclaim with great surprise “But that is very important!”. When she explained to him who she was, he snobbishly replied, “Oh, I thought you were a mere woman”.^{xi}

Conclusions

This article has analyzed the mobilities, careers, and contributions of early female academics in the University of Cambridge from their first university appointments in 1926 to the end of the first postwar decade in 1955. Based on a comparative statistical analysis of academic leave of absence taken by men and women, and on biographical case studies of women, it offers five conclusions relevant to wider discussions in feminist historical geography (Domosh and Morin 2003) that require further elaboration and differentiation through the study of female and male academic practices in other elite and less-elite institutional settings.

First, this study has shown that early female Cambridge academics used academic leave as frequently as men but were less integrated into (inter)national knowledge networks. Women focused their travels more on research than did men, rarely attended conferences, and

travelled less extensively overseas. This absence of women from conferences and their underrepresentation in overseas travel provide a specific answer to Domosh's (1991, 102) question about "particular historical reasons for the invisibility of women in the discipline" that can, arguably, be applied beyond geography.

Second, this study has revealed that early female academic travelers from Cambridge did not replicate the focus of masculinist scientific geographies on the emerging hegemonic research universities in the United States by demonstrating a stronger emphasis on destinations within Europe. This meant that women did also not benefit to the same extent than men from cumulative processes of academic mobility and collaboration with the resource-rich and prestigious United States. But since all travelling academics, in an increasingly specialized division of labor between disciplines, contributed "to a synthesizing geographical consciousness" about the places they visited (Heffernan 1994, 22), I argue that feminist historical geography and feminist historiography of geography could usefully "broaden our definitions of geography" (Domosh 1991, 101) to include academic travelers from other disciplines.

Third, this article has identified early female Cambridge academics as highly talented, research-active individuals, who often had demonstrated their outstanding intellectual capability in school and university exams. In addition, however, they typically required the financial security of an upper middle class background (largely to study without the need to earn a living at the same time) and diverse support networks of sympathetic men and women in order to pursue their careers irrespective of the actions of unsympathetic colleagues (Dyhouse 1995) and powerful discourses about the gendered nature of different fields of knowledge (Traweek 1999), the prime role of women as mothers and homemakers (McClellan 2015), and intellectually inferior female scholarship (Whaley 2003). This harsh

selection process meant that these women made contributions to knowledge that were mostly equal to, and sometimes more distinguished than, those of their male colleagues.

Fourth, this article supports Shils's (1996) view that, at a time when less than three percent of an age cohort attended postsecondary education in Britain (Jarausch 1983, 16), entering an academic career was especially perilous for women. As outsiders to long-standing "masculine cultures of sociability" (Pietsch 2013, 80), women often needed more cultural, economic, and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986) in order to succeed as minorities in academia, especially because men—not only those from non-traditional backgrounds (Jöns 2016)—heavily relied on networks of academic patronage and friendship (Etzkowitz et al. 2000). While there has been "a strategic need to assert gendered subjectivity in order to focus on women as a group in an attempt to address their absence from the historiography of geography" (Maddrell 2009, 8), I argue that more comparative perspectives on the life-course trajectories of women and men are needed to achieve a better understanding of gender inequalities without stereotyping gender differences.

Finally, it is important to note that many women capable of pursuing an academic career left this path to fulfil their traditional roles as wives, mothers, and sociable hostesses (Dyhouse 1995). Studying the contribution of women to university-based knowledge production, circulation, and transfer should thus not be confined to *formal feminization* through employed female academics but also consider *informal feminization* through the intellectual contributions of women who were denied an academic career, or left their positions to raise a family, but who supported their academic spouses in a variety of ways, in similar ways as Thomas' (2004, 2009) work has revealed the significant contributions of Mary Curzon, who lived as the British viceroy's wife in India between 1899 and 1905, to geographical knowledge production, imperial politics, and the career of her husband George.

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Tables

Table 1.

Cambridge University Teaching Officers (UTOs) by academic post and gender

Academic year	1926-27		1935-36		1945-46		1950-51		1954-55	
Academic post	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A Professors	54	18	69	20	67	19	84	16	90	15
Male	54	100	69	100	65	97	81	96	88	98
Female	0	0	0	0	2	3	3	4	2	2
B Readers	21	7	27	8	26	7	48	9	45	7
Male	21	100	27	100	26	100	46	96	43	96
Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	2	4
C Lecturers	197	67	221	63	228	64	332	62	389	65
Male	187	95	209	95	212	93	305	92	364	94
Female	10	5	12	5	16	7	27	8	25	6
D Demonstrators	22	7	36	10	38	11	75	14	79	13
Male	22	100	36	100	38	100	72	96	78	99
Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	4	1	1
E UTOs [A-D]	294	100	353	100	359	100	539	100	603	100
Male	284	97	341	97	341	95	504	94	573	95
Female	10	3	12	3	18	5	35	6	30	5

Source: Cambridge University Library, Cambridge University Reporter, volumes 57, 66, 76, 81, 85; author's compilation.

Table 2.

Cambridge University Lecturers by discipline and gender

Disciplines	Academic year		1926-27		1935-36		1945-46		1954-55	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
A Language & cultural studies	51	26	55	25	62	27	94	24		
Female	6	12	5	9	8	13	12	13		
B Historical & philosophical studies	36	18	35	16	31	14	47	12		
Female	1	3	2	6	2	6	2	4		
C Social & economic sciences	15	8	23	10	20	9	46	12		
Female	1	7	1	4	2	10	3	5		
D Geography, archaeology & anthropology	4	2	15	7	17	7	31	8		
Female	0	0	1	7	2	12	4	13		
E Agricultural sciences	8	4	10	5	12	5	9	2		
Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	11		
F Biological sciences	33	17	30	14	33	14	59	15		
Female	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0		
G Physical sciences	11	6	13	6	15	7	33	8		
Female	0	0	1	8	1	7	1	3		
H Mathematical sciences	22	11	23	10	20	9	29	7		
Female	1	5	2	9	1	5	2	7		
I Engineering sciences	17	9	17	8	18	8	41	11		
Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
J Cambridge University Lecturers [A-I]	197	100	221	100	228	100	389	100		
Female	10	5	12	5	16	7	25	6		

Source: Cambridge University Library, Cambridge University Reporter, volumes 57, 66, 76, 85; author's compilation.

Table 3. Applications for leave of absence by Cambridge University Teaching Officers by type of application and gender, 1926-27 to 1954-55

Type	Applications				Granted leaves					
	All		Academic		All		Academic		Academic overseas	
Gender	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A Female	90	4.7	53	5.1	85	5.4	47	5.0	25	3.7
B Male	1842	95.3	986	94.9	1489	94.6	894	95.0	654	96.3
C Total	1932	100.0	1039	100.0	1574	100.0	941	100.0	679	100.0

Source: CUA, GB, Min III.1 to Min III.7 and GB, Box 301 to 308; author's compilation.

Table 4. Granted academic leaves of absence by Cambridge University Teaching Officers by type of academic work, gender, and destination, 1926-27 to 1954-55 (in percent)

		Unspecified				Visiting				Advisory			
Type of academic work		sabbatical		Research		positions		Lecturing		Conferences		work	
Destination	Gender	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
A	United Kingdom	N/A	N/A	35	44	1	0	14	0	4	0	28	23
B	Overseas	N/A	N/A	65	56	99	100	86	100	96	100	72	67
<i>Total (row percent)</i>		8	21	36	53	11	6	16	9	18	4	11	6
<i>Number of granted academic leaves</i>		74	10	320	25	96	3	147	4	161	2	96	3

Source: CUA, GB, Min III.1 to Min III.7 and GB, Box 301 to 308; author's compilation.

Table 5. Granted academic leaves of absence by Cambridge University Teaching Officers by discipline, gender, and destination, 1926-27 to 1954-55 (in percent)

Destination	Discipline Gender	Natural & technical sciences				Mathematics		Social & Economic sciences		Historical & Philosophic al studies		Language & cultural studies		Total	
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
A	United Kingdom	20	14	32	50	33	37	49	80	31	52	27	47		
B	Overseas	80	86	68	50	67	63	51	20	69	48	73	53		
<i>Total (row percent)</i>		<i>55</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>		
<i>Number of granted academic leaves</i>															
		<i>494</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>63</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>108</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>83</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>146</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>894</i>	<i>47</i>		

Source: CUA, GB, Min III.1 to Min III.7 and GB, Box 301 to 308; author's compilation.

Figure captions

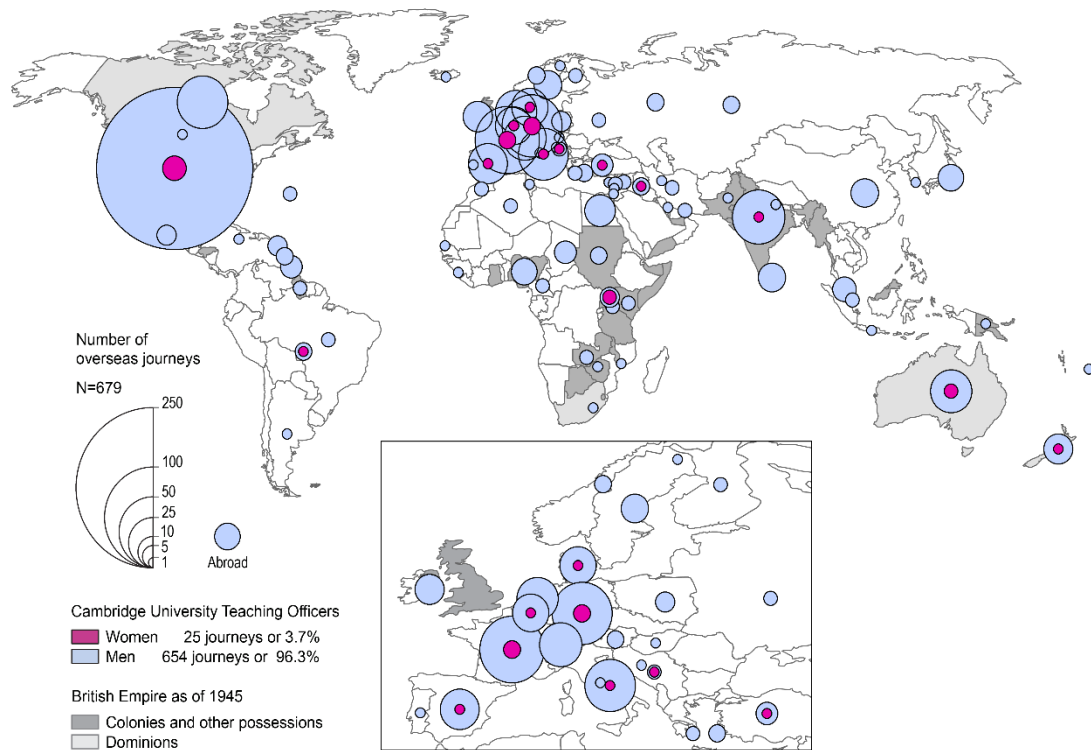
Figure 1. Overseas academic leaves by Cambridge academics, 1926-27 to 1954-55

Source: CUA, GB, Min III.1 to Min III.7 and GB, Box 301 to 308; author's compilation.

Figures

Figure 1.

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ⁱ Minute of 24 October 1928, Cambridge University Archives (subsequently CUA), Minutes of Proceedings at a Meeting of the General Board of the Faculties (subsequently GB), Min III.6, p. 49.

ⁱⁱ Minute of 29 February 1928, CUA, GB, Min III.6, p. 35.

ⁱⁱⁱ Worts Fund, Minute of 29 February 1928, CUA, GB, Min III.6, p. 35; and Worts Fund, Minute of 13 March 1929, CUA, GB, Min III.6, p. 64.

^{iv} Girton College Archive, University of Cambridge, Personal papers of Margaret Anderson, Minnie Baldwin, Margaret C (Nan) Anderson and Frank Anderson (subsequently GCPP Anderson); and Minute of 22 April 1931, CUA, GB, Min III.6, p. 120b.

^v Margaret Swainson Anderson, Girton Review, Michaelmas Term 1952, pp. 5-6, GCPP Anderson 1/1, p. 5.

^{vi} Mabel C. Wright to Miss Butler, 6 August 1944, GCPP Anderson 1/1.

^{vii} Margaret Anderson to Mary Cartwright, 17 January 1951, GCPP Anderson 1/1.

^{viii} Obituary of Professor Joan Robinson, *The Times*, Wednesday, 10 August 1983, King's College Archive Centre, University of Cambridge, Personal papers of Professor Joan Violet Robinson (subsequently KCPP JVR), Box 15.

^{ix} Obituary of Prof. Joan Robinson, *Daily Telegraph*, Wednesday, 10 August 1983, KCPP JVR, Box 15.

^x Minute of 24 November 1954, CUA, GB, Box 308, p. 65.

^{xi} Ruth Cohen's address at the Memorial Service in King's College Chapel, 29 October 1983, KCPP JVR, Box 15, p. 2.