GENDER STUDIES IN HUNGARIAN PUBLISHING

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Abstract: After the change of regime in '89 in post-socialist Hungary, the social and political status of women and the judgement on their role changed significantly, having a stimulating effect on gender research and the discussion of these issues in scientific journals and popular media. The number of publications dealing with the issue of gender showed visible growth in the years following the change of regime, but an essential increase took place after the new millennium. In addition to the translations and interpretations of Western works as well as the partial results of domestic peripheral scientific research, more comprehensive, independent studies were published as well. The number of scientific workshops dealing with this topic increased, and the professional work began in more and more areas of science. The problem of gender has step by step appeared in public and higher education since the 2000's, the first schoolbooks and educational auxiliary materials applying gender aspects have been published. However, the wide-ranging expansion of the gender awareness and the discussions on this topic were hindered by many factors. The results of researchers were often shared only in close professional circles. Publishers considered it to be very risky to put out works representing an approach generally not accepted on the market. Libraries do not look for and order publications like this, as they are following the existing demands of readers. Application of a gendered viewpoint has not become general in education yet. Public opinion is still strongly traditional in this field.

Key words: Gender studies, gender in publishing, gender in libraries, gender-focused attitudes in education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Consideration of the situation and the role of book publishing may provide additional material to change the attitude and interest related to gender. The professional and business preferences in book publishing, the function of the book market and the enrichment of library book stocks can adequately describe and reflect the actual state of public opinion, follow interests and attitudes concerning
different topics, while forming and exerting a certain influence on the public view and the development of social attitudes and prioritization of values.

In the United States and Western Europe, publishing results concerning gender research in both broader reaching as well as the specifically gender-focused literature have gained ground since the 1970's and 1980's. In Hungary, as in all other countries of Eastern Europe, this was a time when an all-controlling state, which meted out a semblance of equality to all of its "subjects", could not possibly tolerate such a new, critically minded scholarly approach. Professional interest in the field of gender was deflated by the formalist women's policy of socialism, and even after the political transition, academia and public discourse were slow to accommodate these issues (Leitch 1992, p. 316; Belinszki, 2003, p. 171).

In Eastern Europe, thinking in terms of gender, the enforcement of equal opportunities for women has progressed very slowly even after the change of regimes. However, the interest of society is still low, beyond some central provisions made in the political and economic spheres of gender relations. In spite of this, raising the gender issue, related research and publications play an important role in the democratisation process in Eastern-Europe (Zimmermann, 2007).

This article is a part of a doctoral thesis, which examines the situation of gender studies in contemporary Hungary. The methods of research were: bibliographic documentation, database queries of libraries and book-distribution agencies, and interviews with a sample of publishing house directors.

2. THE SITUATION OF GENDER RESEARCH IN HUNGARY

In the West, the first big wave of historic works dealing with women's issues, mainly works on the life, activity of famous women, rulers, scientists, and artists were published. They were mostly about women who became successful in the male world, in traditionally "male roles". They were followed by writings dealing with female institutions, organisations, schools, and books on the employment of women, earning their own living, and the effect of this on the system of social relations. And finally came the historical analysis of the development of the family, and the family model. The situation in Hungarian publishing in the 1990s was very similar, except that these topics appeared concurrently with each other, first with the translation of publications considered part of the core canon of feminist studies in the West, then with writings reviewing the Hungarian situation (Pető, 2009, pp. 4–6).

Gender studies in Hungary and the publication of findings did not begin until the middle of the 1990s, and were initially associated with large Budapest-based universities, like Central European University, Corvinus University and Eötvös
Lóránt University. Universities in the country, particularly in Szeged, Debrecen and Pécs, joined the ranks. These scholarly circles, research teams and specialist programmes concentrated on adapting the findings of foreign schools, adjusting the new approach to local conditions, and introducing the subject in institutions of Hungarian higher education. Even universities have been tardy in embracing the new approach, while its debut in scholarly and public discourse, as well as secondary education, has been all too recent (Eörsi, 2004; Pető – Szapor, 2007, pp. 75–79).

At the same time, research made a considerably belated impact in Hungarian book publishing. In the 1990s, journals increasingly featured studies in the subject and a few specialist periodicals started to bring out thematic special issues. The first such writings were from the 1993 special issue of the journal Tér és Társadalom (Space and Society), entitled, "Women in Space and Society", and a compilation entitled "A Feminist Approach to Literary Studies" was published in issue No. 4/1994 of Helikon.

The gender question was the subject matter of only 6 or 8 books annually, most of which were translations of already standard works in foreign-language literature. One reason was the fundamental transformation of book publishing in the wake of the transition, with the shift from state-patronage to market compatibility. The monopoly of the former publishing giants was undermined by dozens of newcomers. While book publishers wanted to make available as much of western culture and learning to Hungarian readers as possible, there were economic considerations that took precedence. Under such circumstances, publishers undertook the task to bring out scholarly works, a niche market of low profitability, only when the demand was manifest. Since gender was an issue in which the majority of society adopted a traditional stance, publishers were wary of going against the trend and championing books in the subject (Gyökös, 2008, pp. 5–6).

The transition in public thinking was less spectacular than that in government. Freshly learned but not ingrained, the democratic norms were not equally applied to all aspects of social relations. The question of gender was considered secondary to such currently momentous issues as the shifts in the country’s economic and political system, and the reactions earned by feminist statements that went against the grain were more likely to be reserved than welcoming. No more conducive was the fact that, following their institutionalisation, the work of the scholarly circles and research teams that dealt with the subject of gender became somewhat self-absorbed. They presented their findings in specialist journals and at conferences to a limited camp of fellow experts. They failed to fertilise, or establish productive relations with either the broader social sciences or public discourses. All this of course was also typical of the salad days of discipline in the West. There, however, receptive and well-capitalised university publishing houses could risk to open a
new channel and direct scholarly results towards an interested reading public. Hungarian institutions were lacking in both comparable funds and a similarly strong commitment (Belinszki, 2003, p. 171).

Scientific publication has a stimulating effect on gender research and the discussion of these issues in social dialogues. Books, which have a higher publication volume engage a wider spectrum of society, and have a great role in the wider-ranging expansion of a gendered perspective, and to critically call general attention to this topic. Against this, the results of researchers meet only close professional circles during conferences and in periodicals. The selected subject is adopted in a more comprehensive and refined way in the books published, which is the opposite of analyses in professional articles which concentrate on smaller sub-fields, and then often simplify, a phenomenon-focused approach of educational journalism. So, advancing a given subject in book publishing may have a longer-lasting attention-attracting influence as well as the power to transform broader social perspectives.

In scientific analysis, the review of gender was hindered by the fact that due to its nature, the topic required an interdisciplinary approach. This differed fundamentally from the educational and research approaches, where the structure of the Hungarian system of higher education and scientific institutions are based on classic academic fields of science. In the existing system, it was difficult to find a place for gender, and it was slow in gaining prestige. Researchers started to deal with the gender issue in sub-fields of other sciences (historical, language and literary studies, social psychology, sociology, geography etc.), and within their institutional frameworks. This way, they moved in the periphery of their own discipline, and on the other hand, the still-developing field of gender research could not integrate the different sub-fields either. Thus, experts worked mainly in parallel, and it was not possible to conduct comprehensive research with no major summative, synthesizing works produced. The partial results, however important from a scientific point of view, failed to raise significant public interest, and subsequently publishers seldom undertook their publication (Bíró, 2007, p. 191; Comments of Directors of Balassi and Gabo Pub).

The small circle of researchers and publicists connected mainly to individual institutions, organisations, journals, and the narrow circle of those actively interested who gathering around them, created the impression on many as if the new approach to gender served only a particular class interest. Another problem was that initially the books published on the topic of gender were mostly works in women's studies in the strictest sense, or popular science. They emphasised only one important, previously missing aspect of the whole issue, the female approach, discussing it from a minority point of view, trying to call attention to the continuous reproduction of the inequality existing in society. This is actually
understandable, since works of this type were not available in Hungarian. On the other hand, the complex review of the system of gender relations, the publication of works showing and analysing the processes and their interactions was lacking. Thus the discussion of the issue has remained a part of the broader feminist movement to this day and this does not help in strengthening scientific legitimisation, nor the social readiness to accept it (Belinszki, 2003, pp. 170–171).

3. GENDER STUDIES IN PUBLISHING

Following the first sporadic occurrences, Hungarian publishing houses began to bring out titles in gender studies (i.e. popularised versions thereof) from 1993–1994. In 1997–1998, the output doubled: besides translations, local research centres also brought out their findings, mostly in small-run publications from their own institutions. However, the publications were issued only in smaller numbers of copies, reaching only a few interesting circles, and were not able to exert significant influence on the wider-range expansion of the feminist manner of speaking in the Hungarian language and regarding the general acceptance of the critical examination of gender in public thought. The number of books, literary, educational and scientific works dealing with the social construction of sexual roles and turning freely against the traditional sexual attitude, habits, has increased to a larger extent only since the 2000’s (Séllei, 2000).

The development of the distribution, acquisition and publishing of books in Hungary can be exactly followed by means of the data of the Hungarian Library Service (KELLO) SAP Database, HunTéka cooperation and the National Document-Supplying System (ODR). The KELLO has contracts with approximately 3000 libraries. Twice a month, it edits, publishes and provides libraries with issues of the informative publication entitled, *New Books*, to give advice on the enlargement of library stock. This periodical endeavours to provide insight into the entirety of new, Hungarian-language books published every two weeks, including complete bibliographical data.

If we take a closer look at gender studies titles in the past ten years, a total of 210 works were published (186 first editions and 24 reissues). After the first two years of the 2000s, when 10–15 books were published in the field, a significant increase came in 2003 when 27 new publications were offered, thanks in no small part to commercial publishers taking an interest. Their awareness of foreign trends and what they saw on offer at foreign book fairs prompted a few publishing houses to bring out popular discussions of the subject, often with translated works. Between 20 and 25 publications annually were to define the subject on the Hungarian market until 2007, when 49 publications came out, and this run of 45–50 titles per year is valid to this day. Generally speaking, a title in the other social
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sciences (e.g. in history or sociology) is responsible for 200–300 individual book orders (KELLO SAP Database).

This considerable increase in the number of publications has been stimulated by a growing public interest whose intensity and motivation, however, has been rather heterogeneous. The growth is in no small part due to the activity of commercial publishers, who capitalise on both western trends and local interests. Hungarian gender studies have substantially expanded, and there are a growing number of forums where the results of research can be also be made available, and utilised, by a wider audience. These include the new MSc programmes, launched under the Bologna Plan, the EU-financed ATHENE 2 (Advanced Thematic Network of Women’s Studies) research and course development project, the public seminar series called Gender Studies (Társadalmi Nemek Tudománya), the Feminist Open University, etc. (Kereszti, 2007, p. 645).

To minimise their business risk, publishers have tended to bring out publications in gender studies in small print runs, so that accumulating interest leads to the reissue of specific works. The 210 gender-related publications of the 2000s were brought out by 87 publishers, of which 46 were each responsible for only a single title.

Most publishers which have produced more than five book-runs can be classified into four categories. Some are long standing specialist publishers, who have regularly dealt with the social sciences (Osiris, Napvilág, Új Mandátum, Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, Európa Pub. etc.). There are newly established, obviously profit-oriented houses which saw a business opportunity in the growing public interest, both at home and abroad, which they satisfy with popular works (Kairosz, Tinta, Aula, Alexandra, Gabo, Pub. etc.). Some of the publishers are positively committed to the publication of gender-related, and so-called women’s, literature (Replika Kör, Animula, Ulpius Pub. etc.). These sometimes even take the initiative to launch a series. Though their main profile is literature, they sometimes bring out scholarly works. These included, for example, the series "Artemis Books" from Csokonai Publishing House, "Feminism and History" from Balassi Publishing House, or "Léda Books" from Kijárat Publishing House. They published primarily fiction, social science or popular science books representing the social construction of gender roles, but at the same time also questioning the justification of their traditional conditioning. Finally, university research centres and certain government institutions constituted the fourth source of specialist publications; most importantly among the latter, the Ministry of Social and Labour Affairs, and later, the Ministry of Family Affairs, brought out five instalments of the "Shifting Roles" series of studies, and has since 2001 co-published, with the Central Bureau of Statistics, "Women and Men in Hungary", a statistical yearbook (Séllei, 2000).
In Hungary, gender studies have close links with other fields of knowledge because the various centres established the direction and objectives of their research vis-à-vis the other disciplines. Accordingly, the 210 books mentioned can be connected to one of the following fields: sociology (45), psychology (38), history (37), cultural history (30), linguistics and literary studies (20), political studies (18), and other (22). Examining in more detail the gender books published between 1995 and 2005, the main topics were the following: female roles (24%), gender and sexuality (14%), the world of science, education and art (13%), feminism (11%), the issue of equality of opportunities (11%), the world of work (10%), family (9%), family model, gender communication (6%).

KELO is now the contracted partner of about 3000 libraries in Hungary offering a list of new publications every two weeks, complete with reviews and bibliographical data (catalogue entry, subject headings, UDC number, recommended shelf number), which helps librarians to make purchases. When we look at the purchases libraries make on the subject of gender, we find that popular science is the dominant choice. 40% of specialist titles (most of them with an interest in history or sociology) sell about 100 copies each. 35% of such publications sell in the region of 40–60 copies, the remaining 25% interest 10–20 libraries. Generally speaking, a title in the social sciences is responsible for 200–300 orders(KELLO SAP Database).

Not unrelated to the limited number of titles published in Hungary, major national and university libraries have relatively small collections in gender studies. On average, 30–40 titles published in Hungary and abroad in the 1990s can be found in these libraries, and 70–80 from the 2000s. Characteristically, more than half of the titles are in a foreign language, and this is not only because several of the key works in field were authored in English and most are still not translated. Even in the case of Hungarian scholars, libraries may keep more of their works in a foreign language than in Hungarian. This again highlights the problems of Hungarian book publishing, a tight market that offers little motivation for the publishers of specialist literature in gender studies. A Hungarian researcher may sometimes find it easier to appear in a foreign tome than to be published in Hungary. On the other hand, the relative novelty and diversity of the subject discourages scholars from creating the kind of comprehensive overviews (like university course books) that commercial publishers would find to be a sufficiently appealing proposition (Comments of Directors of Balassi and Gabo Pub.).

As in the case of other disciplines, here too a breakthrough is hampered by a difference between the interests of those involved: researchers (authors), publishers, distributors (retailers) and buyers (readers). Scholars seek to present the most recent findings in the most exact form possible. Publishers, however committed they are to conveying science and culture, cannot ignore financial implications. Distributors are often aware of reader demands, but a significant
portion of the titles (especially those published by research institutions) never reach them, and hence the wider public. Libraries that need to keep several copies of the same title will have limited funds to satisfy reader interests, and no resources to seek out additional titles. Commandable solutions are not unheard of, but more often than not, communication between the four parties is a matter of contingency, as there is no institutionalised form or technique (Sipos, 2007).

The library, as a buyer, shows rather limited interest for the time being. This suggests, in addition to the ambivalent social attitude towards the topic, and the tight financial circumstances, that approaches sensitive to gender issues, as already established among Western-European libraries in the 1980s–1990s, is hardly yet present in Hungarian libraries. In spite of the fact that the library profession is strongly feminized, a professional approach focusing on gender roles is far from becoming common (Hannigan, 1994; Kozmáné, 2003, pp. 13–15).

4. EDUCATION AND TEXTBOOKS

The greatest receptiveness for the professional issue of gender was shown by universities and other levels of higher education. The attitude based on the social construction of gender first appeared in these institutions and, later, their application became quickly generalised in different fields of life. In the 1990’s this subject could first of all be discussed using the framework of special courses of lectures, facultative studies, and accompanying seminars dealing with one special scientific partial issue (such as micro-history of society, history of manners of living, feminist literature, social and employment issues, discussions of demographic processes). Although, a slow institutionalising process started in gender studies education, this approach remained only a specialised sub-field, a curio in each area of science. It could not become a new paradigm generally accepted and applied in the study of sciences (Bíró, 2007, pp. 188–191).

Textbooks, lecture notes, chrestomathies and other types of anthologies, as well as various educational auxiliary materials made for university students that usually deal with specialised subject matter such as the theoretical and historical aspects of gender studies; they do not undertake the examination of overall social, political, cultural or scientific processes, issues through this modern attitude – although, it could command interest to a larger extent.

Public secondary education seems unwelcoming to the findings and approaches of gender studies that has gradually established itself in higher education. There have been notable experiments, new study programmes developed, course books and supplementary materials of a new approach prepared – but these have remained isolated affairs. Though elements of the problem of
gender have found their way into the curriculum, the overall attitude of education in this respect has remained traditional (Gore, 1996; Kereszti, 2007, pp. 640–642).

Textbooks and workbooks play an important role in gender socialisation, the development of identities determined by society. In the world of school they are one of the main means of social model learning, they transmit social expectations, and reflect the accepted system of values. At present, most of the school textbooks contain a lot of stereotypical elements both in terms of the general approach and concrete examples, language use and illustrations. They seldom reflect critical thinking in terms of gender. Women are almost “invisible” in these works; they appear rarely and almost exclusively in traditional roles, mainly as wives, mothers or in peripheral, only women-related connections (Müller, 2001; Szabados, 2001). The specialist literature of pedagogy itself has failed to sufficiently integrate the conclusions from gender studies. The approach integrating gender issues has not become institutionalised, or yet established in pedagogy, and in teacher training. The main basic principle in education is the transmission of a universal, neutral image of man. The development of cooperative, problem-solving and conflict-managing skills with an understanding of gendered experiences is not given due attention. The gender-conscious attitude, considerations of gender in each subject matter have not been included in the official curriculums in the educational system yet. The principle of equal opportunities for women is contained in the National Core Curriculum. It is emphasised as a basic democratic value, in legal and moral connections. However, it is not described as an overall attitude, discussing it in each subject matter. In 2006, the Ministry of Education prescribed that for a text book (teaching material) to be accepted (10/2006. III. 27. OM), it also has to pass a test of equal treatment. This, however, provides only for the screening of openly discriminative, sexist or racist statements, and does not guarantee a fundamental change in the orientation of course books (Rédai, 2005; Pető, 2003, p. 528; Thun, 2006, pp. 118–119).

The attitude of publishing houses also plays a major role in the publication of new textbooks that are sensitive to gender issues. It requires a serious decision, involving a significant business risk in certain cases, whether textbooks should reflect an approach considered novel by parents and teachers, giving rise to debate now and again, or to apply the traditional, accepted approach and system of concepts. Publishers are discouraged from introducing new text books (teaching materials) due to the fact that to gain official recognition, the volumes not only need to earn the approval of diverse committees, but also require considerable additional investment (about 1M HUF in total). Today, about 100 publishers engage in textbook production, but 90% of the market is divided between five of them. The programmes for which schools choose textbooks were usually developed earlier, so a new publication is a risky investment. Compared to the
other social sciences, gender studies experts are less inclined to write text books (Apple, 1991; Kereszti, 2005, p. 57, 65).

5. CONCLUSIONS

Publishing the results of research on gender or disclosing the examination of different social and scientific issues from gender-focused approach (in digital or printed form) may efficiently arouse the interest of the society, form public opinion, develop responsiveness in this direction and expand it in larger circles. In this respect, book publishing in Hungary has achieved only moderate results as of yet. After the Regime Change in ’89, but especially since the 2000's, the interest of researchers and readers has increased gradually in gender studies; and publishers have issued books on this topic in greater numbers than before.

However, research that does not go beyond specialised sub-fields, analysis for small professional groups; more comprehensive, summarising studies are published only rarely. In view of economic aspects, publishers hardly undertake the greater business risk to issue books on this subject. Libraries cannot spend much money on books of this special field because of their tight acquisition limits; and the interest of readers is also moderate because the traditional attitude is still dominant. The gender-focused approach has not yet become generally accepted in education, and therefore, textbooks consequently representing this viewpoint are not often published.

A significant change in mentality, more open discussions on the subject, wider professional cooperation, and new approaches contributing to the integration of a gendered perspective would be required of researchers, publishers as well as libraries, so that gender studies could reach the segment conforming to their importance in Hungarian book publishing, and the general public should show more interest and receptiveness in thinking about gender.

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