

BECOMING A MAMA PHD IN A POST SOCIALIST COUNTRY

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E tanulmány kettős természetű. Artikulálja az akadémiai esélyegyenlőség (hozzáférés, nyelvi korlátok) alapkérdéseit, felvillant néhány női életút-töredéket a XX. századból, felvet (az adott posztszocialista országra jellemző) női létkérdéseket az akadémia világán belül és kívül, valamint nemzetközi szinten kutatóknak helyzetének kihívásait jeleníti meg – e jellemzők mindegyikéhez személyes reflexiókat fűzve. Kizárólag nyelvészeti és társadalomtudományi aspektusú, genderhez köthető jelenségek is tárgyalásra kerülnek, bár a szerző nem a társadalmi nemek hivatásos szakértője, hanem egy olyan kutató, aki közoktatásban dolgozó pedagógusból vált pedagógusképzővé, a neveléstudományok doktorává, miközben – pedagógus házastársával közösen – megalapította otthoni ötgyermekes laborját.

ABSTRACT

The nature of this study is twofold. On the one hand it articulates equality challenges of academics (access to field, language boundaries), state of the art of women outside and inside academia in a post socialist country (spotting some puzzles of women's historiographies from the 20th century), and that of female researchers on an international scale while on the other hand it is a personal reflection of each of these features. Gender in the present study is aimed at being understood from linguistic and sociological approaches exclusively. The author is not a gender studies expert but a woman who started as a school teacher and made it to a doctor in education tenured at a university while establishing her home laboratory of five children with her spouse.

LINKS TO BEREHOVO

The day I received the information about the acceptance of my post-doctoral research proposal was the very day I got to know I was pregnant with my fourth child. It was a mid-September afternoon in 2013 and due to the second news I had to postpone my Erasmus teaching visit to the Teacher Training Faculty of Berehovo. By the time I got to Transcarpathia my belly was big enough to win the sympathy of both colleagues and students there not merely as an academic but as a mother to be again as well.

Almost three years passed and I was invited to a conference to Berehovo in April, 2016 again that (due to another breastfeeding period) I could only attend with my spouse and a five

months old cutie – the fifth representative of our home laboratory. Colleagues kept on asking me how I was able to manage family and carrier at the same time so I decided to write about it for a possible international audience with similar challenges – focusing my own social status, roles, and femininity at a time, as basic gender issues (Holmes 2007).

GENDER AND LANGUAGE

For someone who has never been educated in gender studies due to the lack of representation of this academic field in his or her country, especially if their mother tongue does not have the concept of gender in its structure, it may cause difficulties to interpret gender approach – may Chomsky be unquestionable about universal grammar (Chomsky 2007).

Hungary, as we are to see in a minute at the time of my first visit to Berehovo was a state where gender studies were not represented in tertiary education run by the state, a place where within the structure of the official language of the state, Hungarian, the concept of gender is incomprehensible.

A State without Gender Studies

Gender issues were rather poorly focused within Hungarian academia at that time. According to the that time database of tertiary education courses regarding Hungary (Felvi 2011) the only institution offering a master course in gender studies was the Central European University (CEU), located in the capital, Budapest, established and run by the once Hungarian billionaire, George Soros in 1990. CEU was accredited as a university in Hungary only in 2006. Its faculty and students are recruited from the wider Eastern European region, and it has not yet developed strong ties to Hungarian academia (Pető and Szapor 2007:163). The gender studies course – just like any other courses, offered by the CEU – is run in English (which of course is not the language of the state and not the mother tongue of the citizens of the country), available for from one to twenty students from September 2012 and costs the total yearly income of my (Hungarian) spouse (who holds a BSc and has been working for more than 25 years, recently as a vocational instructor in a secondary school) per semester.

The Gender Studies Department at the CEU was established in 1995 in order to facilitate the flow of ideas between Western and Eastern Scholars. Conferences have been organised and volumes have been edited since then but the quality and methodology of the lectures and studies presented via these odium show a rather uneven picture. Although the programme has a relatively good library relevant academic literature produced in Hungarian is not easily accessible (Zentai and Krizsan

2003:18). A visiting Fulbright scholar remarks that even ‘changing gender bias in Hungarian higher education will ultimately be most effective if and when taken up by scholars and activists who study these problems in the Hungarian language’ (Estruth 2008:60). Due to the absence of organised, solid foothold of gender studies at Hungarian universities we can trace the ‘failure of women’s and gender history in Hungary to create a scholarly community that transcends the traditional chronological and disciplinary boundaries’ (Pető and Szapor 2007:162).

When a bachelor student of mine asked me recently wondering where she can master gender studies (how come, the student was a she) I asked her about the level of her English – as the relevant CEU eligibility criteria is a completed TOEFL, Cambridge Advanced, Cambridge Proficiency or IELTS exam. She does not have any of those qualifications – which is a typical feature of a BA student nowadays in the country.

Although there is no doubt about the role of English as today’s lingua franca we need to admit that those (including myself) who have been brought up outside the Commonwealth, Britain’s Overseas Territories, Ireland and the USA have a linguistic handicap when it comes to one’s chances in quality education (– therefore one of my best decisions have proved to be that I started learning English in secondary school). In other words: Standard English empowers you and the question of linguisticism, i.e. ‘ideologies, structures, and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate, regulate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language’ (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000:30) raises.

As Professor Trudgill, a world-renowned sociolinguist and one of the foremost researchers on the regional and social dialects of British English

puts it: if non-standard speakers are being discriminated against, why should you say 'Well, you should speak Standard English' – it would be the same as suggesting Black people (Trudgill's phrasing) to become white or recommending women to become men when they are discriminated against (Kontra 2000:26).

An Official State Language without Gender

Inequalities in terms of language continue if we take a closer look of the Hungarian language itself. There is no doubt that most academics speak several languages other than their mother tongue but these researchers probably acquire an Indo-European language as their first language while Hungarian belongs to the Uralic language tree. In other words in order to acquire the lingua franca (i.e. English) as the primary tool of several academic fields you are luckier than Hungarians if your first language is Punjabi or Kurdish, German or French, Macedonian or Polish – because these languages show much more features in common with English than Hungarian (*nota bene* it is true vice versa, so if you succeed in acquiring Hungarian you can be sure you have done a great job).

When talking about gender in languages I do not mean the lack of gender of nouns but the missing concept of reference to people according to their gender. Hungarian is a genderless language, meaning that it does not only lack grammatical gender but gender-specific pronouns. You need explicit statements in case you want to refer to grammatical gender: 'the woman' (she) or 'the man' (he). Considering the 3rd person singular pronouns there is no distinction between 'he/she', 'his/her' or 'him/her'. This feature might imply that pronouns are neutral or equal in nature – let us leave its reasons behind for linguists or fiction, if you like.

To make our case even more complicated, the translations of 'sex' and 'gender' to Hungar-

ian are also problematic since these terms are translated with the homonym: *nem*, which means the negative particle ('non' or 'no'). Therefore, when the first written document to introduce gender studies in the Hungarian higher education system during the first phase of Transition Years entitled *nem-tudomány* (a 'non-science') was submitted to the accrediting institution it met very limited success (Pető 2004:176).

Discussing some probably relevant characteristics of my mother tongue I do not wish to argue pro or contra along the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (i. e. language determines thought, Key and Kempton 1984) and perform sink or swim, either or mentality but suggest that speakers of different languages may think differently, 'to demonstrate the causal role of language' during the process of our altering interpretations of the world – as a Stanford psychology professor suggests (Boroditsky 2010).

A BLINK ON THE STATE OF WOMEN IN HUNGARY

In spite of the lack of national policy towards gender equality in science and research in Hungary (Palasik 2009:1), even if there may be concept-misinterpretations of gender in this country and in spite of my mother tongue be genderless, one thing is still certain: there have been women living in the Carpathian Basin for thousands of years. Before you get frightened, Dear Reader, do not worry: I am not going to detail women's history in this region for centuries but intend to offer you a short walk in this field starting with the era of communism and socialism (the latter is usually interpreted as a slighter form of the first one), through Transition Years until today.

A Brave New World East of Eden

Each of us has our own historiographies, our frameworks through which we seek to find

out whats and hows and whys of the past decades (Pető 2002:952). According to Rueschemeyer ‘early socialist theorists advocated that women be brought into the labour force and into the public sphere so that they could contribute their energies and intelligence to the creation of a more egalitarian society’ (1998:3). In my perception as a child it meant that my grandma who we used to live together with (my mothers’ mom, born in 1935, and who completed seven grades of primary education) went working three shifts to a starch factory, whereas my mom (born 1953, who made it to two college degrees *after* she had me and my brother) worked two shifts as a kindergarten teacher – ensuring other women’s work outside their homes. After these proper working shifts they had their family responsibilities plus work in the field – mean it literally, i.e. agriculture.

My grandma was a leader of a working brigade named after Tereshkova, the first woman in space and attended church (the Roman Catholic) every Sunday praying to Virgin Mary, just to strengthen gender balance in the Transcendent Sphere, too. In her perception Catholicism and Communism had the very same purpose: ensure equality for good people – on Heaven and Earth, so I could not really comprehend at the age of five why my grandma’s workmates were laughing at me when she took me to the May 1 festival to celebrate the great achievements of communism and I started singing ‘hallelujah’ in the crowds.

During the early years of communism, when my grandma had my mom, she had to leave her to her own mom and other elderly ladies in the village who were ‘only’ working on the fields and at home so that she could go work and build socialism. By the early seventies, the time mom had us, Hungarian state-socialist governments established a structure of social support (that is still taken as granted in most post-socialist countries) so she took maternity

leave after me and my brother for four years and completed college in the meanwhile.

Far Away So Close

Those female who lived in the city have done their parts equally. The lady, who used to live one stairs below us, over 90, suffered from Alzheimer and other mental, neurological diseases. She used to work as a music teacher and was a mother of two male intellectuals in their late fifties: one lives and works in the USA and visited her for a few weeks every year whilst her other son is a prominent person at the local university but I had never seen him in this blocks during the fourteen years I lived there. Her daughter in law, a librarian at the university and their daughter, a student who usually walked a dog sometimes came along.

For a couple of years two private district nurses had been taking care of her every day and one of them invited me into this old lady’s apartment one day – adding that the owner of the flat claimed that she would not let in pagans. The fragrance of passing filled the air, the floor was still covered with the very same linoleum that was laid in the late sixties when the freshly built same block apartments were handed to uranium miners and socialist intelligentsia (although my good old lady neighbour had been educated in institutions of catholic nuns before the 2nd World War just like my father’s mom and his sisters who could not make it until 90 but lived as educators of communist and socialist regimes although their education had been organised and carried out by the Roman Catholic Church in the twenties – thirties – forties of the past century), the place looked as if it had not been painted for thirty years, and the antique furniture extremely different in style from that of the apartment it was placed in was sending a message I could not decode from the past. My old neighbour was lying in her stylish wooden bed in an implausibly bright yellow

nighdress, speechless, fading away senseless while having spent her life provoking others' senses... The nurse said she spent most of her time awake praying or clapping hands, assisting children to find the appropriate space in melodies.

Maternity leave

Looking back to the economies of Eastern European countries, including Hungary between the 2nd World War and the Transition Years, we can conclude that maternity leave was a hidden form of unemployment. The state was the primary employer of its citizens so during those years unemployed people counted as criminals who were put to prison for sloth if caught by the police. The amount of money one received while on maternity leave was not a great sum (I remember mom crying after a shop accident when I wanted her to buy me a lollypop which she could not afford and the shop assistant called her cruel hearted) but enough to survive month by month.

Today there are several forms of parental leave but one is eligible only if she or he has been working insured for at least a year before they claim the support. Low but stable financial support for parents may seem to be a comfortable option for the unemployed – most of the time the uneducated, especially the Roma/Gypsies are accused of that option in Hungary – although in many cases it is a must rather than a choice. The maximum period of post-natal leave is three years, although the last year is paid at a very low rate, approximately 75 Euros per month (Korintus and Gyarmati 2011:134). The first widely known example of a man taking parental leave in Hungary was the case of the husband of a pop singer during the first phase of Transition. This example was interpreted as a symbol of hope for democracy – in several senses remaining a utopia as most Hungarian women not only

work full-time jobs outside of the home, but are also usually the sole managers of household labour and child-rearing responsibilities (Estruth 2008:47).

Although the findings of a 'family and gender role survey' conducted as part of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) during the first phase of the Transition Years found that the majority of Hungarian adults object to the full-time employment of mothers with young children and suggest that 'mothers of pre-school children should ideally stay at home' (Blasko 2008) we can trace a different picture within the last couple of years. Reasons behind why most people, primarily women do not live with the option of parental leave is embedded in the processes of the crisis from 2008 on. Your employee may vanish from the market by the time your baby is a few months old, however from the child-development perspective there is research suggesting that supporting social environment (i.e. family) and high standard child care (which is not available in the country, concerning especially socially disadvantaged locations, in rural areas – and the least developed regions, mostly inhabited with the Roma/Gypsies) adds to work-life balance in women's decision making regarding the optimum length of parental leave (Blasko in Korintus and Gyarmati 2011:135).

OVERCOMING GENDER BIAS IN THE WORKPLACE

Work-life balance for women seems to remain a challenge as women do not seem to have an idea that their own relevant hardship experience is not an individual problem (Olgiati and Gillian 2002). The phenomena that women are discriminated against at their workplaces in regard to salaries, working hours, professional respect and abuse is familiar throughout the whole Europe (Olgiati and Gillian 2002, Kelan 2009) – and there are cultures in

the Old Continent where such issues are not even raised on the level of policy making due to the general triumph of traditional gender roles. A female acquaintance of mine holding three degrees and having three children told her story to me the other day – she could not find a job in any of her qualifications and when finally she became employed as a real estate agent she was fired after a few months as she was not available for 24 hours a day.

Even though politically correct as it is to suggest that your workplace is gender neutral (see concepts and definitions of the European Commission 1998 such as ‘gender equality’, ‘gender equity’, ‘equal opportunities for women and men’, ‘equal treatment for women and men’) this is not the case in practice. Gender fatigue (i. e. individuals becoming tired of acting upon gender discrimination in spite of the fact that incidents of gender bias dominates) is present due to the lack of room for articulating relevant experiences (Kelan 2002). Bridging the gap between policy and practice is a must – for female researchers as much as women of other professions. Let you belong to any of these categories or may you be a spouse, partner, father, son, or brother of a female, Dear Reader, during the following pages you are offered some examples of the attempts of the author and her fellows worldwide at balancing career and private life.

Academia Almighty

According to the founder of the European Mothers in Science (Mochmann 2008), in most European countries females are under-represented in higher academic positions throughout the Old Continent. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP, West and Curtis 2007) suggests a similar picture: the percentage of women in academic positions drops off the higher they climb in the United States. A survey conducted by the International Studies Association in 2009

(Hancock and Baum 2010) also validates that the percentage of women significantly declines as scholars move up the career ladder. Hancock and Baum investigated academic publishing and found that ‘the only statistically significant advantage enjoyed by men concerned publication rates for non-books – that is, articles and book chapters -- where men scored modestly higher than women’ (Hancock and Baum 2010:27). As publications, i.e. academic records earn one tenure we can conclude that the reasons behind low representation of women in academia must be other than professional ones. Women who do achieve tenure track placement tend to report slow advancement, income disparity, and lack of job satisfaction compared to their male colleagues (Evans and Grant 2008).

Studying gender discrimination in education is extremely significant (Estruth 2008:47) as the classroom – let it be one in tertiary education – is one of the few social spaces devoted explicitly to studying and learning – even in unconscious ways. As such, the classroom provides a unique, ‘invaluable opportunity to break cycles of sexism through direct experience, discussion, education, reform, and behaviour modification’ (Estruth 2008:47).

In the case of Hungary it was only in 1948 when all universities were opened for women (Kollonay Lehoczky 2006:83). Although by the second phase of Transition extension of tertiary education reached its top ranks at the Millennium – the number of people attending universities tripled by 2003 – and at that time the ratio of female students in Hungarian universities reached 57%, the circle of tenured lecturers remains the privilege of male professors: slightly more than one third of assistant professors are female, women who are appointed associate professors make up one fourth of the relevant total and only one tenth of full professors can claim that they are representatives of the ‘weaker sex’ (Kollonay

Lehoczky 2006:97-100, Estruth 2008:46). Hungarian women are also under-represented in scientific committees, especially those concerning technological higher education and natural sciences (Palasik 2002:38). Although women represent a mentality in leadership that societies cannot go without and the promotion of women's scientific career is a serious economic and labour market interest in practice female researchers are underrepresented in research and development in general (Palasik 2009:12).

We can conclude that academia seems to remain the property of male scientists worldwide, however there are female researchers represented who ensure quality and speak for themselves – just think of the volume you are reading at the very moment, Dear Reader.

Mama PhD

Within the category of female doctors there is a group of ladies who are seen in rather controversial ways: women who gain doctorate and in the meanwhile remain on the mom track – including the author of this contribution. In Cologne, Germany Mochmann established a network for 'European Mothers in Science' (EMIS) in May 2005. About a hundred female academics from diverse disciplines and different positions from all over Europe have registered to the network that collects links, experiences, suggestions, questions from mothers in science in the Old Continent. As stated in their homepage (<http://www.mothersinscience.eu>) the founder of the network encourages female academics 'to have a real chance to decide whether they want to become mothers or not without having to risk their academic career or neglect their scientific interests'. The goals of the network are to increase knowledge among employers about the positive qualities of academic mothers, to encourage female academics to pursue both family life and academic career and to

increase the proportion of female academics with children in all positions at universities or research institutions, especially in Europe (<http://www.mothersinscience.eu>). Although the site was last updated February 2012, the latest news published there refers to a project which was carried out a year before. This feature suggests that sustainable development of such a project may be a hardship, quite probably due to the challenges of its own nature.

The burning nature of the issue of mothers in academia is pictured overseas as well in a recently published literary anthology (Evans and Grant 2008), that brings together a selection of deeply felt personal narratives of women who have experienced the continued gender inequality in higher education and urge changes that could make venues of tertiary education more family-friendly workplaces. The authors, forty-one women, either have their PhDs, are working on a PhD, or started a PhD and left their programme as a result of motherhood. Unlike the members of the EMIS network the contributors of the volume represent the array of disciplines within the social sciences and humanities and their pieces offer a variety of perspectives, including those of adoptive or single parents. A parallel between the authors of the edition and the members of EMIS is that they address topics that range from the level of policy to practical day-to-day concerns, such as negotiating viable maternity and parental leave policies, job-sharing options, employment risks, miscarriages, fitting into desk/chair combinations while eight months pregnant, breast-feeding on campus, caring for a child with special needs and the diverse collection of concerns of family members, colleagues and doctors regarding the unacceptable and outrageous nature of the combination of parental and academic roles.

In one of the essays of the Mama PhD edition (Evans and Grant 2008) the authors compose

their Momifesto (Kuhn, Millis, Rowe and Webster Garrett 2008), including ‘ten things they wish someone had told them’. These statements include advises concerning the biological, psychological, physical and social aspects of pregnancy and motherhood and also summarise some lessons regarding their (our) mission – mostly seen as impossible. Kuhn and her colleagues conclude that ‘you can be dedicated both to your profession and to your family despite those in your department, college, and universe who act as if you can only devote yourself to one or the other’ (Kuhn, Millis, Rowe and Webster Garrett 2008:242), although ‘your identities and behaviours may become über-fragmented, and that is, though complicated, perfectly acceptable’ (Kuhn, Millis, Rowe and Webster Garrett 2008:243) and still ‘you do not have to pretend that it is easy to be both professor and mother’ (Kuhn, Millis, Rowe and Webster Garrett 2008:244) – what more: ‘you can promote motherhood professionally’ (Kuhn, Millis, Rowe and Webster Garrett 2008:245). As for the final remark we need to note that professional projects regarding motherhood maybe carried out outstandingly well in the humanities and social sciences, although doctor mommies in mathematics other than its applied forms may question this option.

As proven in a similar edition, that focuses on challenges of moms with a doctorate in the natural sciences (Monosson 2008) ‘only four out of twenty-nine mothers maintained academic careers without significant (read: beyond maternity leave) interruptions, and three of those received their degrees in the 1970s’ (Kuperberg 2009: 314). The experiences collected by Monosson therefore leave the reader with a more depressing cast of mind. As for the authors in Evans and Grant’s edition, mama PhDs representing mostly the humanities and social sciences: one third of the authors left academia (note that there is no comparison in ratio to those who leave academia and are *not* mothers or even women).

Über Fertile Female Doctors

Europe is said to have aging societies (i.e. the population of the European continent will decline in the near future, both in absolute and relative terms – Toth 2009:15, Kamaras 2006) unlike the USA, where the average number of children in a family is two (Hirschmann 2005, Wilson 2009:16, 18). The average number of children in a family today in Hungary is 1.32 (Kopp and Skrabski 2007) – and there is widespread acceptance of childlessness, which was not a characteristic of the Hungarian society before the Transition Years (S. Molnár in Korintus and Gyarmati 2011:137). Relevant data concerning the total fertility rate among the Roma/Gypsies, the biggest – and in general the most handicapped in social terms – minority in Hungary however reaches 3.00 (Janki 2005:138).

The case of educated women in Hungary regarding childbearing proves negative correlation: the more educated you are the less likely you risk giving up your position in the labour market (Kopp and Skrabski 2007). This phenomenon is far from being a Hungarian. Academic women in the international arena are well aware of the harm that having children can do to their professional lives.

Having more than two children for a woman in academia is definitely a taboo – so here we are, Dear Reader at my touchiest topic – be aware that you are reading the lines of an alien.

Women with many children are seen by their faculty peers – both male and female – as less serious about their work: ‘even administrators who consider themselves supportive of female professors with children may question the wisdom of those with more than one or two’ and ‘women with several children say colleagues and supervisors alike are not shy about sharing their scorn over the women’s über-fertility’ (Wilson 2009:16-17).

Although after tenure an academic career can be flexible, keep in mind that the female colleagues I am talking about and for rather bear into than are born into the world of sciences. No wonder, researchers who study the issue claim academia being one of the less friendly professions for women with children. According to Wilson, studies have found that 'male professors are still more likely than their female colleagues to have a stay-at-home partner and less likely to say that because of their careers, they had fewer children than they preferred' (Wilson 2009:18). Research carried out in Hungary also suggests that people have actually less children than they desire for (females 2.14 versus males 2.13 – Kopp and Skrabski 2007).

Still, one question remains: if having a big family (as far as having five children par excellence can be considered big) and a big career (as far as tenure can be interpreted as such) is so unusual and ungainly, how have some academic women made it work?

BIO-HISTORIOGRAPHY OF A DOCTORAL DEGREE

At this point all I can offer you is a brief summary of my own long story as I have not carried out a research to answer the question raised above – yet. A bit of personal history is necessary here – and I dare to do share that in this contribution as similar examples have been introduced alike by several academics before (O'Neil 2001). Take it as a case study under the freedom of the qualitative paradigm and bear in mind that the subject and object of this case is the very same person – may you recall everything and anything you have read about the reliability and validity criteria while interpreting. In the meanwhile you may acquire some bits of the policies and mechanisms of tertiary education of a post socialist country in the first two decades of Transition Years.

Once Upon a Time there was a School Teacher

My career path can be considered quite an unusual one. I graduated from a prestigious secondary school located in the Trans-Danubian, south western, hilly, multicultural, Mediterranean part of the country in a city with a history leading back for more than two thousand years, in the very year of the Regime Change in 1990 – so the wind of change in my case blew both towards entering a new phase of my personal life (i.e. adulthood) and that of my country (i.e. democracy) – both desired quite much at the time.

As for the first choice of my tertiary education it took me to the eastern part of the country, the centre of the Great Plain where I found both the human and the natural environment being extremely different in several concerns from that what I had been used to. I spent five years there and gained two bachelor degrees: one that enables you to teach every school subject in primary school, specialising in English and another that certifies one's abilities concerning teaching children in pre-school and kindergarten ages – most likely because these were the occupations that I had been most familiar with due to their representation in the family of my childhood.

Regarding teaching practice and experience during this time I had a chance to deal with children in kindergarten, teach classes in the first seven grades, take care of teenagers with social handicap in the afternoons, teach a mix graded class of a farm school, train adults working for a factory of a small town in the Central-Eastern part of Hungary and also a class of fifth graders in a multicultural school in Birmingham, UK (Potts 2003) as a part of a TEMPUS exchange programme. Each of these activities took from one week to one year long experience – and as early as at this stage of my career the fact that I am interested in the education of the socially handicapped regardless of age indeed crystallised quite clearly.

Armed with this diverse professional experience I moved back to my home town to study education on master level at the local university (the option of further studies was not available in the town I completed college education) – the one I became a tenured lecturer of fifteen years later. In the mid nineties Hungary did not apply the bologna structure so one had to spend at least another three years at university in order to gain a master diploma. I did so (while working as a teacher of English in a primary school in a suburb of blocks) and received my master degree in education, specialising in curriculum development at the age of 26.

The tuition fee of my first bachelor degree that took four years to gain was sponsored by the state – according to the common practice in post socialist countries of those times. It means that neither you nor your parents would – and could – save money for your education from your birth as it was – and in people’s mind still is – taken as granted by the state. The second, supplemental bachelor degree had to be paid by myself – one semester cost the total monthly income of mine so it was affordable. The master degree in education turned out to be more expensive but my workplace supported it from a budget that was given to schools from the state in order to support their employee’s further education. In the case of the school I worked for at the time none of my colleagues intended to take this option so I could claim the money although I was not a tenured employee.

Who Wants to Be a Teacher-Trainer

At the very last semester of my master studies in education I had a chance to teach professional socialisation – with an experience of five years of teaching – to a class of trainee teachers as a compulsory part of my studies (i.e. teaching practice) and this experience made me realise that this was a role I would

picture myself in – later on. Although back at college a demonstrator position was offered to me during the last year of my first studies, the option of returning to a city with a longer history of education – the local university of my home town was first established in 1356 as the very first institution of its kind in the country – seemed to be a better idea.

Having mastered education the chance of applying to a doctoral school opened – in Hungary you need a master degree in order to start doctoral education – but this choice at that time did not seem to be life-like. In spite of my qualifications labour market options testified the need of qualified teachers of English. We write 1998, when Russian as a compulsory modern foreign language vanished in the haze from institutes of public education and for historical reasons German is the language that most people speak – if any – besides their mother tongue. After the 2nd World War when Russian was introduced to schools, teachers of it were one lesson ahead of their students in the language books they say. Well, the situation was quite similar concerning English during the first phase of the Transition Years.

This is why I chose to master English as the next step of my education – and another five years for the next degree: three to complete studies and another two for thesis writing. As for tuition fee I had jobs where my employers supported my efforts from the state budget mentioned above: a village school, where I had started my primary education twenty years before (where I was a pupil of my father’s mom in the very last year of her teaching career) and later a unique setting of education: the first minority nationality school for the Roma/Gypsies in Europe, the Gandhi School, internationally interpreted as ‘an experiment in Roma education’ (Van Driel 1999) and a symbol of a chance of a democracy being born. My interest concerning

minorities had been present in my career since it began. During the years when I was completing my master in education I had a colleague – student fellow who was working for the Gandhi School – this is how I gained a close picture of this institution for the first time – the institution that became the field of my research later on.

Almost a Linguist

As I had been teaching English in the Gandhi School, I became interested in the languages my students spoke – Boyash, an archaic version of Romanian – spoken by the minority of Roma/Gypsies living in Hungary but by the majority of those who attend the Gandhi School – and Romani – the language recognised as ‘the international language of the Roma/Gypsies’ (Lakatos 2008:, Dezsó 2009b:95).

Although I had not completed my masters of English (writing my thesis was still ahead) I started a course in applied linguistics at the local university (sponsored by myself – tuition per semester cost a monthly income of mine) and began a research on Romani-Hungarian bilingualism, focusing on conversational rules in Romani-Hungarian bilingual spoken discourse. The findings of this research opened the doors of an outstanding international multidisciplinary program for me a few years later, however at this point I had to make one of my most serious decisions ever that leads us back to the discussion of the work-life balance dichotomy. The man of my life proposed and I accepted, realising that linguistic anthropology would not fit in to the vision we shared concerning our future family. I quit the programme (that may be interpreted as a failure of the field) and finished the master course in English.

Double Track

By that time I was tenured at the Gandhi School so I could demand maternity leave

(Korintus and Gyarmati 2011). Applied linguistics remained left behind but I started an MPA (master of public administration) in education management, a degree needed for becoming an official expert of my original field. The course lasted for two years and took place in the capital so I needed to travel long hours accompanied by a breast pump and a freezer bag. Bottles that I filled with milk – it still sounds like talking about a dairy cow – I needed to put in the fridge at the porter’s office of the school where the course was organised. In the fourth semester the porter asked me ‘Are you *still* breastfeeding?’ – and the answer went: ‘No, sir. I am breastfeeding *again*.’

In case you started your tertiary studies during maternity leave until December 31 2006 in Hungary, full tuition of your course was supported by the state. I had been using this option for two semesters for my MPA studies when I got to know that my hometown’s university started a doctoral school in education in September 2006 I realised it would be the last option that I could use to complete a doctorate avoiding home economy crises – as for my future career plans it was quite clear that the job I had been doing as a single person would not accommodate the family project we were running. I thought, I would not walk away from what I aspired to for more than ten years. As the lawyers I knew encouraged me when I was asking if there was any restriction in legislation concerning the *number* of the courses the state supported, I applied, was accepted and started the doctoral course – and continued the MPA one in September 2006 – and had my second child a month later. Two weeks after delivery I was sitting in my doctoral classes and felt absolutely thrilled with enthusiasm concerning both my second child and second chance of becoming a doctor.

There were frightening moments occasionally on the way I got there, I must admit.

Once when I was skyping with the organiser of a three week long summer university course I won a grant for during the afternoon nap of my six months old son, my two and a half year old daughter went for an adventure to the bathroom and explored a shaving kit – and gave it a try. Still, most of the time I was just exhausted. Similarly to mama PhDs on the other side of the globe a project went something like this: ‘start writing, give a bottle, return to writing, find a toy, write a little, change a diaper, write more, give a hug, and – then – finish the sentence I started an hour ago’ (Kuhn, Millis, Rowe and Webster Garrett 2008:243). By the time the third child was born – after the second year of the doctoral course, in the summer – I felt pretty skilled in techniques that allows you to read and tame your baby at the same time while breastfeeding.

PhD in Education

Driven by the interest of a wider context (i.e. relevant policies of education, political changes of the era, consciousness of the feature of minority nationality education regarding the Roma/Gypsies, sociological and psychological aspects of the target group of such education) of what I had been doing for the past five years out of my curiosity no cats were killed but my dissertation was compiled. As emphasised above, prior to my PhD studies I had worked for the Gandhi School as a teacher of English as a foreign language and a patron of teenagers (between 1999 and 2004) therefore, within the environment in which I was conducting my research (2006-2009), I was known. Issues of access to the field, as Hirsch and Gellner describe (2001:4-6) are usually left out from research reports, although they arise concerning boundaries. Without the support of the headmistress of the school between September 1999 and June 2009, I could hardly have access to data, such as institutional documentation, informants of

my interviews or questionnaire essential to the research I conducted.

Also the research possibilities of the internet offered a gold mine – and great comfort with the children at home – as the subject of your analysis was out there on the world wide web. The organisation at work, its self representation and the remarks of the guest book used both by insiders and outsiders of the school resulted in e-anthropology, if you like – unrevealing processes of the past and the ongoing. While completing the courses of my doctoral school in education I won a grant for a three year long programme that allowed me to join an international and interdisciplinary community of researchers interested in issues concerning the Roma/Gypsies – again internet access via moodle promoted fruitful discussions on topics of common interest.

Regarding lecturing I started to teach master classes as a compulsory part of my doctoral studies in its third semester (September 2007) and based on the positive outcomes I was invited again to substitute professors more and more frequently. During the final phase of composing my dissertation a vacancy was announced at the Institute of Education so I applied for the job and won it – although they asked me during the interview if I wanted more children and I honestly told them that it was actually my spouse who did not want a fourth one. By that time my smallest child was two years old so I did not hesitate to start – officially. Practically it did not feel like a start but as a legitimisation of the work I had been doing crowned by a title achieved based *not* on theory exclusively. (Since then not only the fourth but the fifth child have enriched our family and my academic work has not stopped by any means.)

The vision that most people share and most moms realise – according to my experience amongst mommy fellows, supporting data

(Blasko 2008) – concerning maternity leave I must have definitely missed – however *je ne regrette rien*. Even developmental challenges of my own children I interpret as a possible way of deepening and broadening my professional expertise, i.e. education – may the Reader remember Anna Freud's mechanisms of defence of the ego (Freud 1937).

And for the lesson of my dissertation it may be interpreted as a piece of work driven by bio-historiographical needs and concerns: projections of a journey of the self as a member of a post socialist society aiming at formulating democracy symbolised through challenges of minority nationality education of the Roma/Gypsies (Dezső 2009a).

CONCLUSION

As I have been rather intimate throughout this piece of work let me start my final consequences with a personal reflection. While compiling this contribution I re-read a relevant classic by Hirschmann (2005) and evoked some ideas concerning well off versa well being – although you can always claim that voting for the latter one – in case you examine the question as a dichotomy – remains a refuge of those in weak economic positions – including myself.

Hirschmann gives the reader some rules as a recipe: '1. Prepare yourself to qualify for good work, treat work seriously, and don't put yourself in a position of unequal resources when you marry... 2. Women must treat the first few years after college as an opportunity to lose their capitalism virginity and prepare for good work, which they will then treat seriously... *The best way to treat work seriously is to find the money. Money is the marker of success in a market economy; it usually accompanies power, and it enables the bearer to wield power, including within the family...* 3. If you are good at work you are in

a position to address the third undertaking: the reproductive household. The rule here is to avoid taking on more than a fair share of the second shift... 4. *Have a baby. Just don't have two...*' (itallicised by the author, Dezső – see Hirschmann 2005).

Although the logical order of Hirschmann's reasoning is brilliant I have doubts about the validity of such prescriptions (maybe only because those are explicitly offered as such) – even if some of those prove to work as presented by my case. Personalising her rules I conclude that as Hungary is not a successful actor of market economy you may claim that within the world I am most familiar with money does not buy one success, however another personalised interpretation of this Hirschmann rule in my case would be that the ways I found money – other than mine or my parents' own – to support my education was an empowering factor. As for power relations within the family and concerning the number of children prescribed I definitely represent a counter example – and wonder if life may be lived relying on the pure reasoning since poor old Kant.

The journey I took my Reader to is coming to its end. My contribution was intended to tie together those conjured up throughout: mostly women of the 20th century Hungary, students, educators and academics in time and space in and outside a post socialist country and contemporary fellow female researchers sharing similar hardships in different parts of the world.

Finally let me express that I embrace an approach according to which it would be rather unjust to judge the quality of an academic (or any) person along his or her gender, marital status or the number of children he or she has – if any. Therefore take my story as a description and by no means as a prescription, in any ways.

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