

Abstract

In the initial two decades of the 20th century, two women named Mrs Géza Antal resided in Budapest. Both of them signed their books using their married names. The first was the Dutch Adele Sophie Cordelia Opzoomer, wife of the Reformed Bishop Géza Antal. The second was the journalist René Wertheimer, wife of the Jewish railway clerk official Géza Antal. Of the two, it is the Dutch lady who is better known in Hungary today, largely due to the fact that researchers attribute to her the 1913 book of reports, titled 'Beyond the Palaces: Reports on Pest' which was published under the name of Mrs Géza Antal (Markó, 2001). However, this volume contains sociological reports made by the journalist Mrs Géza Antal (née René Wertheimer) in disguise in the slums of Budapest.

The confusion is due, in part, to the identity of the names and the tendency of researchers to focus on female gender roles, while failing to consider the state of the journalistic profession at the beginning of the century. It therefore appeared reasonable to conclude that the wife of a Reformed Bishop would have been driven by a 'Christian view of poverty' and, in accordance with traditional female roles, 'active in the field of charity' when writing about the plight of the poor (Perényi, 2018).

Indeed, that the initial two decades of the 20th century in Hungary represented a period during which women were able to pursue a career as professional journalists. In order to achieve this, they adopted and followed what they considered to be masculine elements of journalistic culture. For example, they adopted the practice of dressing in disguise and visiting dangerous neighbourhoods and institutions (such as night shelters) for middle-class women, a practice previously undertaken by male journalists. It can be seen, therefore, that the aforementioned volume on poverty was not concerned with traditional female norms, but rather with the norms associated with the male profession. The male journalists' assertion that only those engaged in this practice could be considered 'real' (i.e. professional) journalists was accepted by the first women considered professional journalists too. What is more, these women also accepted that female 'media workers' (editors, columnists) dealing with women's affairs and issues (such as fashion and women's emancipation) were not professional journalists, even if they worked for a national daily newspaper and had full-time job like them.

My presentation will focus on three groups of women journalists who are largely forgotten. The first group comprises those who worked in the first decades of the twentieth century and were considered professional, for example, René Wertheimer. The second group includes those who were not regarded as 'real' journalists. The third group comprises their predecessors from the second half of the nineteenth century Hungary who were effectively disowned. (Some individuals belonging to these groups are identified as writers, whereas their contributions to journalism have been largely overlooked.) My presentation will analyse their journalistic identities, norms and practice, and the development of a journalistic group consciousness (especially the question of the inclusion of female journalists).

Bio

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