

Part II

(Mis)interpreting Beauvoir

Philosophical and Ideological Framing
of the Text

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4 “Goulash Socialism” vs. Feminism? Beauvoir in Hungary

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Feminism itself has never been an autonomous movement: it was partially an instrument in the hands of politicians and partially an epiphenomenon reflecting a deeper social drama.

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949; trans. 2011)

This chapter seeks to illuminate the ways in which cultural and historical conditions in Hungary have made aspects of Beauvoir’s thought less legible in the socialist and post-socialist context. Setting out these conditions, the chapter goes on to investigate how the abridged Hungarian translation distorted Beauvoir’s argument conceptually and linguistically, and therefore limited its ability to set an agenda and vocabulary for feminist thought and activism in Hungary. The chapter concludes by suggesting ways in which Beauvoir remains relevant to the situation of Hungarian women in the twenty-first century, arguing that a new, complete, and philosophically aware translation of *Le Deuxième Sexe* has the potential to offer a reflective space and conceptual tools for countering the right-wing Christian conservatism and repressive gender politics of the Orbán regime.

Background

Le Deuxième Sexe was published in French in 1949. It took a further 20 years for a heavily abridged version to be translated and published in Hungarian, *A második nem* [The Second Sex] (1969). This delay is notable, and intriguing, because Beauvoir’s other works tended to be translated and published quite promptly in Hungarian. Evidently, there was a public appetite for her work, and the socialist regime found the content acceptable. For example, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* was first published in French in 1958 and translated into Hungarian in 1961. *America Day by Day* was translated in 1960, *Force of Circumstance* in 1965 and *The Mandarins* in 1966. Although beyond the scope of this chapter to investigate the reception of Beauvoir’s other works in Hungary more fully, one may speculate that Beauvoir’s narrative outputs resonated

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with the concerns of the Hungarian state and Hungarian readers. This is because her memoir, novels and travel writing tend to critique the comfortable bourgeois life, charting the intellectual awakening of many of her protagonists, whose character arcs see them committing to active responsibility for the collective good (Mambro 2019). For Hungarians reading within the context of a socialist state, these representations would resonate with popular discourses around praiseworthy behavior and good citizenship. Zsuzsanna Clark, for example, recalls “the overriding sense of community and solidarity” growing up in communist Hungary (2002).

To comprehend the reception of Beauvoir in Hungary, we need to understand the context – there is nothing like feminism in Hungarian culture until 1989. This period (1956–1989) is often referred to as “Goulash Socialism” and tends to be grouped with the historical experience of other Eastern European countries situated behind the Iron Curtain under the influence of the Soviet Union and subject to communist or socialist regimes (the terms “communist” and “socialist” are frequently used interchangeably in this context). Attila Melegh points out that Eastern socialism has “a very complex history with a very complex set of institutional and social actors” (2011, 264). “Goulash Socialism” began with János Kádár’s leadership of the Hungarian Communist Party (and the country) in 1956, following the failed anti-Soviet revolution, and lasted for 32 years until Kádár’s resignation in 1988. The Kádár regime is generally taken to span from 1956 to the collapse of communism in 1989 (Hungarian Spectrum 2020). The Kádár regime and its aftermath in Hungary is referred to as “Goulash Socialism” because it mixed different economic models (rather like the traditional Hungarian dish, which includes whatever ingredients are to hand) and was relatively liberal compared with many other Eastern bloc countries. Johanna Bockman summarizes the development and effects of goulash economics as follows:

After World War II, the Hungarian Communist Party took control of the country’s political life and immediately launched a socialist experiment based on the Soviet model with its characteristic central planning, hierarchical enterprises, and state ownership of the mode of production. The Soviet model was also imposed on the profession of economics and neoclassical economics was declared “bourgeois” by Party leaders because of its ideological ties to capitalism. The result was a novel form of market socialism known as “goulash communism.”

(Bockman 2013)

Bockman goes on to note that despite the avowed socialist intentions, “Party-state elites promoted an apparently narrow form of neoclassical economics, which actually maintained existing hierarchical institutions.”

This context is important for our investigation because it establishes that despite the superficial attitude that feminism was a bourgeois

response to unequal Western capitalist societies, and therefore irrelevant in socialist Eastern bloc countries, nonetheless, just as in the West, popular culture shows a sexualized and sexist context in which the male gaze is normalized. Christiane Nord asserts that “translating means comparing cultures” (1997, 34). By extension, critical explorations of the publication and reception of translated texts require a deep awareness of the target culture. While cultural realia from the period of “Goulash Socialism” are hard to locate, here we offer two specific examples. First, the front page of an issue of the 1970s Hungarian communist youth publication *Magyar Ifjúság* carries a full-page photograph of a young woman lying on her front on a patch of grass, leaning on her elbows reading a book. Her pose exposes her cleavage as fully as possible, her low-cut top making her nipples almost visible.¹ Second, an online project, Budapest Retró, gathers material from the late 1960s and 1970s. Alongside film of women cooking, and working as machinists, we find the following commentary:

A hetvenes évek eszményített nője remek háziasszony, ugyanakkor ideológiailag magasan képezett, és sokat tesz a közösségért – miközben gyermekét az óvónők gondozzák. A budapesti nőtanács 18 kerületben működtet női klubokat, ahol egészségügyi előadásokat, háztartásigép-bemutatót, és sütés főzés versenyt rendeznek. Tennivaló persze így is akad még! A SZOT [Szakszervezetek Országos Tanácsa] főosztályvezetője szomorúan panaszolja, hogy több évtizednyi lemaradásban vagyunk a Szovjetunióhoz képest, ahol sok helyen a bölcsődék 12 órán át tartanak nyitva. Így ott, az asszonyoknak munka után több idejük jut az ideológiai képzésre és a közösségi munkára...²

[The ideal woman in the seventies is a great housewife, but she is ideologically highly educated and doing a lot for the community – her child is cared for by kindergarten nurses. The Budapest Women’s Council operates women’s clubs in 18 districts, where health lectures, home appliance demonstrations as well as baking and cooking competitions are held. Of course, there is still work to be done! The Head of Department of the SOT [National Council of Trade Unions] sadly complains that we are decades behind the Soviet Union, where in many places crèches are open for 12 hours. Thus, after work, women have more time for ideological training and community work.]

(Authors’ translation)

This material resonates with Nóra Jung’s claim that “During the state socialist period, official representations of women’s interests were limited to their roles as workers and mothers” (Jung 1999, 103). Jung goes on to explain that “During state socialism feminism was officially rejected as bourgeois ideology. After 1989, attitudes towards feminism remain

controversial. Many women are suspicious of feminism because it reminds them of what they perceived as ‘forced emancipation’” by the socialist regime (Jung 1999, 114), thus triggering a mindset of “emancipation fatigue” (Mayer 2020, 105). Indeed, in a 2014 interview Judit Acsady states that after the opening up of Hungarian society, “All other previously rejected political systems entered into the discussion but feminism didn’t” (Feffer 2014). Andrea Pető and Weronika Grzebalska describe a context in which

In Central Europe, post-1989 regime transformation gave preference to economic reform measures over civic and social ones. Liberal norms and practices have never been fully embedded in these societies. This creates a paradoxical situation where illiberal forces have flourished amid an unfinished liberal revolution.

(Pető and Grzebalska 2016)

We argue that the ongoing tensions around gender, human rights and illiberal forces under the current Orbán regime make Beauvoir’s thought urgently relevant for women in twenty-first-century Hungary. As Mária Joó asserts, “Only a comprehensive philosophical work of ground-breaking power such as Beauvoir’s can provide us a chance to cope with our gender blindness – recovering and reflecting on our new and/or old gendered identity – constructed under socialism and deconstructed after the transition” (Joó 2011, 114).

In the “History” section of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir herself is alert to the uniquely conflicted position of women living in socialist regimes. “Woman is both worker and housekeeper,” she observes (Beauvoir 2011, 150). And in a footnote to this statement, she cites a similar example to that described above, in which

Olga Michakova, secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth Organisation, stated in 1944 in an interview: “Soviet women should try to make themselves as attractive as nature and good taste permit. After the war, they should dress like women and act feminine ... Girls will be told to act and walk like girls and that is why they will wear skirts that will probably be very tight, making them carry themselves gracefully.

(Beauvoir 2011, fn50)

This material is present and accurately translated in the Hungarian version. Once again, sexualized and sexist context normalizes the male gaze, promoted even by women subject to it. Acknowledging that the principles of Marxist ideology are egalitarian, Beauvoir credits Lenin with “link[ing] women’s liberation to that of the workers; he gave them political and economic equality” (Beauvoir 2011, 149). However, Beauvoir goes on to identify the “difficult problem” (149) of women’s

role in family life, stating that “as workers they [women] were even more enslaved than male workers” (151). Despite her intellectual enthusiasm for Marx (Kirkpatrick 2019), Beauvoir concedes that

Strictly subordinated to the state like all workers, strictly bound to the home but with access to political life and the dignity that productive work gives, the Russian [communist] woman is in a singular situation that would be worth studying in its singularity; circumstances unfortunately prevent me from doing this.

(Beauvoir 2011, 150)

One might argue that in her precise delineation of the situation of women living in socialist regimes – “she was more dependent on the state than any individual, giving her both more and less autonomy than a bourgeois woman living under a capitalist regime” (148) – Beauvoir has raised awareness and opened a space for debate, calling for others to study that singularity.

This argument is supported by Maria Joó, the only other researcher working on Beauvoir’s reception in Hungary. Her article “The Second Sex in Hungary: Simone de Beauvoir and the (Post)-Socialist Condition” describes “the great success of Beauvoir’s work in socialist Hungary,” pointing to “a second edition of 29,500 copies within a short period of two years after the first one” (2011, 4–5). In this article, Joó notes the difficulty of discovering written evidence for the impact of *The Second Sex* in Hungarian society. She concludes that “I have the only material evidence of the huge number of copies published in two editions” (2011, 5). Nonetheless, Joó argues that Beauvoir did set an agenda and offer a vocabulary for feminist thought to Hungarian women. Despite the differences in situation between Western women in liberal democracies and women living under socialist regimes, Joó asserts that

Some of their [Hungarian women’s] lived experiences, hardly spoken of before, were revealed in reading *The Second Sex*, resulting in a similar enlightening experience to that of American women when reading Betty Friedan. The power and validity of Beauvoir’s description of the situation of women in an androcentric society have remained valid, just as women’s workload in the family has remained virtually unchanged to date.

(Joó 2011, 5)

This insight endorses our argument that Beauvoir continues to be relevant to women in contemporary Hungarian society, and that their lack of access to Beauvoir’s thought (the heavily abridged translation is not currently in print) denies them a reflective space. Ferber et al. write “traditional expectations of femininity and masculinity continued to dominate the private realm [under the socialist regime],” while workplace roles

did imply a “real redefinition of gender, although it was not articulated” (2004, 105). Ferber et al. go on to explain that “These experiences did not appear in the public discourse because of the specificity of the political language [... because the] linguistic frame did not offer any space for feminisms and identity politics” (2004, 105). The ongoing lack of language and space in which to debate these experiences leads Joó to identify the continuing value and relevance of *The Second Sex*: “The enormous importance of Beauvoir’s text for the socialist woman was that it provided her the only opportunity for self-reflection, given that no public political discussion of women’s situation existed where she could have applied her reading” (Joó 2011, 6). Likewise, we find echoes of Joó’s assertion about the situation of women in the socialist era chiming with the contemporary moment. We argue that the lack of public discourse about women’s situation under the Orbán regime points to the urgent need for an accurate version of Beauvoir’s thinking to be made available to women in Hungary. Indeed, Eszter Kováts points out that “The Hungarian case is one of few in Europe in which ‘gender’ is politicized by the government itself as ‘gender ideology,’ which supposedly threatens ‘traditional families,’ children’s identity, and, overall, the future of Europe” (2020, 76). Thus, to talk about women’s experiences in any kind of public forum is seen as threatening national identity.

The Translation Problem: Skopos in Action

Given the complexity of the target culture, and the source text’s explicit delineation of this complexity in terms of Marxist ideology, we move carefully to assess the translation itself. To understand the effects of socialism and its aftermath on the reception of Beauvoir’s thought in Hungary, we will engage Skopos theory. As Renuga Devi et al. describe it, the Skopos approach to translation practice reveals that “A target text is not merely a static item decoded in a language, it is to be read by a target reader, it depends on [a] target reader’s reception and it has a relationship to the extra-linguistic situation in which it exists” (2015, 282). A Skopos approach therefore allows us to investigate the paratext (after Genette) of *A második nem* [The Second Sex], and to assess how far a socialist agenda informs the Hungarian translation. For Genette “the paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered to its readers and, more generally, to the public” (1997, 1). For the purposes of our inquiry, the paratext includes the dust jacket with its Hungarian directives from the editor-in-chief, and the publisher’s information in the front matter, which contains details of the translators and editors, and records Beauvoir’s approval of the abridgements.

We consider *Le Deuxième Sexe* in its Hungarian translation to be multiply marginalized. In the first instance, the source text was written by a woman. This position, in the view of scholars including Barbara Godard, is already doubly marginalized (Godard 1989, note 5). For

Godard, women writers are already using a language marginal to the dominant discourse of the source culture, and this condition pertains to the act of translation where feminist thought is concerned: “Although framed as a transfer from one language to another, feminist discourse involves the transfer of a cultural reality into a new context” (1989, 45). This dynamic is amplified further when female translators are involved, and more so when women’s experiences in the target culture are marginalized and absent from public discourse.

The second layer of marginalization is the status of the target language and culture. Hungarian is identified as a minority language and comes under the protection of the Council of Europe’s Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (2021). The already complex intra- and intertextual relations between Western European and Hungarian cultural traditions need to be understood by anyone engaged in exploring the process of translation between the two. Angus Batey describes Hungary as “a nation cut adrift from its continent by a language unrelated to any other on the face of the planet” (2015). While Batey’s assertion may sound dramatic, and should be tempered by the fact that Hungarian people do engage in other languages and cultures to interact with the world beyond their geographical borders, there are two kinds of significant barrier in place: etymological and cultural. First, Hungarian is a non-Indo-European language: “The Hungarian language belongs to what is called the ‘Finno-Ugric’ family of languages, and its closest cousins (of any significant size) are Finnish and Estonian. But even these are only very remotely related to Hungarian, perhaps like Hindi is to English” (Larsen 2023). Thus, if we consider Gennaro Chierchia’s proposal that “language is mostly a cultural product and embodies and determines the way in which a community views reality” (2010, 144), then we may appreciate that the distinctiveness of the Hungarian language, and its being unlike any other in Europe, may lead to differences in lived experience, how it is framed, understood and articulated, as a result. Communism, and the division of Eastern Europe from the West by the Iron Curtain, also create a more general unrelatability for Western readers. While people from other Eastern bloc countries may be closer in their shared understanding of life under socialist regimes (for example, Yugoslavia was widely known as an acceptable holiday destination), it is also important not to homogenize Eastern bloc countries, appreciating the different permutations of socialism as they intersected with culture and geography. Jan Zielonka, for example, questions “whether citizens, cities and states identified as Eastern European have more in common than a short history of Soviet rule” (2019). Thus, there will be words and concepts that only a Hungarian speaker who lived through “Goulash Socialism” can readily understand. For example:

“mackónadràg” ... is impossible to translate as the literal translation would be “bear cub trousers.” This clearly makes no sense in

English. This type of tracksuit bottoms was a unique Hungarian piece of clothing during socialism. It refers to tracksuit bottoms, made out of soft material, which have an elasticised edge around the ankles. These trousers are associated with middle-aged working-class and lower-middle class men, a type of home clothing that you pop out to the shops in. They also have connotations of pensioners in the provinces.

(Naray-Davey 2016, 54)

This unrelatability can pose challenges for Western scholars attempting to understand Hungarian culture and the status of translated texts – as Mátyás Bánhegyi points out (2013), and as exemplified above, certain pieces of cultural realia are not easily explained to Western readers who have little knowledge of the socialist regime which shaped Hungary's recent history. Hungarian people, however, must by necessity engage in other languages and cultures if they are to interact with the world beyond their geographical borders. This unequal relationship between East and West is important context for any consideration of translation from West to East. For the translation of *Le Deuxième Sexe*, a supposedly bourgeois Western author proposing potentially subversive ideas about feminism suggests a difficult reception. At the same time, critics and translators working from the Western perspective need to take care not to patronize or make assumptions about the relative sophistication of the target readership. We have explored in a previous article to what extent the Iron Curtain excluded Hungarian literary culture from Western critical developments, particularly feminism, and we refer readers there for a fuller exploration of these tensions (Hurley and Naray-Davey 2018, 9).

We will keep this awareness in play throughout our investigation, but first we pause to offer a brief account of the fundamentals of the Hungarian language, which are pertinent to the analysis which follows. Hungarian is a non-gendered language; it has no linguistic nor pronominal gender distinction – it therefore must rely on lexical means for expressing gender, i.e.

He and She = Ő
 Woman = Nő
 Man = Ferfi

While there has to date been very little critical exploration of Hungarian as a “genderless” language, Louise O. Vasvári notes that

Hungarian has richly developed lexical gender with compounds of the type női [feminine/has female attributes] író [writer], nő író [woman writer], írónő [writer woman], which offers additional possibilities but in very confusing connotative jumble, so that, for example, doktornő is a female doctor but a nődoktor can be a male

who is a nőgyógyász “gynecologist,” while a female gynecologist is nő[i] nőgyógyász.

(Vasvári 2011, 160)

Given the potential for such “connotative jumble,” we anticipated that a French feminist manifesto translated into a non-gendered language would offer fascinating and likely problematic translation strategies to explore. We theorized that we would locate the substance of our critique in the detail of the lexical choices as they related to the “genderlessness” of Hungarian.

To our surprise, we discovered a remarkably faithful translation in the material that was present. If anything, one could argue that the non-gendered language enhances the source text’s message. For example, the Hungarian word “nőisors” means “women’s situation” or “women’s destiny” and it is repeated frequently in the Hungarian translation of *Le Deuxième Sexe*, adding many more explicit references to “woman” than the source text, which often relies on grammatical gender to convey the same meaning. In a way, the repetition of “nő” (“woman”) emphasizes the gendered concerns of the source text. We found that this frequent repetition drew more attention to the embodied state of “women’s situation.” Scholars including Sabine Sielke (2009, 23) identify “texts that thematize ‘female experience’ and identity explicitly” as feminist in their approach. We found that the translation strategy from French to Hungarian intensified this effect. While beyond the scope of this discussion, empirical research by Victor Gay et al. supports our tentative suggestion that gender-neutral languages may be more supportive of feminism, finding that “having a sex-based gender system decreases female labour-force participation by 12% points compared to having no gender system” (Gay et al. 2012). This adds to the possibility that Hungarian women under socialism may have found Beauvoir’s ideas irrelevant because in theory they enjoyed political equality as well as the empirical benefits of a gender-neutral language.

A tension emerges here between the potential of the target language to amplify the source text’s feminist message, and the editing and publication strategies which worked to silence that message. We will argue that ultimately the silencing overshadows the linguistic potential and severely limits the translation’s ability to influence its Hungarian readership. Our use of the phrase “in the material that was present” in the preceding paragraph is telling. We discovered significant omissions in the translation, which almost certainly distort the Hungarian reader’s experience of Beauvoir’s ideas. While the mechanics of the translation are proficient in terms of literal accuracy, the text generally is problematic in terms of how it was presented to the target culture. As Joó points out, “The 1969 translation by Lívia Görög and Vera Somló, is of fairly good quality, if this can be said of a text that has been reduced to half its original length” (2011, 114). It is also a matter of record that Beauvoir herself

approved these changes. Page 4 of the Hungarian target text states that the abridged translation has been approved by the author (de Beauvoir) and that the text selected for translation was chosen by Lívía Görög (one of the translators) and approved by Péter Nagy (editor):

A szerző engedélyével rövidített kiadás
 Válogatta: Görög Lívía és a kiadó szerkesztősége
 A válogatást ellenőrizte: Nagy Péter
 [Literal translation into English:
 Abridged edition authorized by the author
 Selected by: Livia Görög and the editing team
 Selected extracts approved by Péter Nagy]

One might argue that publishing some of *Le Deuxième Sexe* in a repressive regime is better than not publishing it at all. Despite an extensive search, we could find no record of Beauvoir's engagement with the Hungarian target text and the translation/publication process. It is possible that, given the multiple translations of *Le Deuxième Sexe* which Beauvoir had authorised by 1969, i.e. Greek, German, English, Japanese, Latin American Spanish, Portuguese, Turkish, Danish, Catalan (Postalcioglu 2016, 25), she simply did not pay attention to the detail.

In Hungary, *Le Deuxième Sexe* was positioned as a work of social science, not feminist philosophy. Agnieszka Majcher outlines the reasons for this positioning:

Research during the communist period reflected the fact that the socialist regime, while paternalistic and restrictive, had women's emancipation as one of its stated goals. As egalitarian legislation and progressive social policy were proposed, though criticism was limited to the bounds of state socialist ideology, the social sciences proved crucial for identifying women's problems, assessing women's advancement, and explaining continuing shortcomings, as well as interpreting the social transformation that had taken place, including its impact on people's lives. Any feminist thinking that might have challenged the basic assumptions of the prevailing ideology was not welcome.

(Majcher 2004, 87)

Majcher's insight explains the paratext on the dust jacket of the Hungarian translation, which carries a statement by the publisher's Editor-in-Chief Zádor Tordai: "Hungarians will not understand, cannot agree with ... for example the author's view on marriage." Such a strident direction from the publisher, together with the significant omissions, suggests that the translation Skopos under the socialist regime would not tolerate material it considered ideologically inappropriate for Hungarian readers. As we will discuss shortly, these themes were dangerous to the socialist

ideology. Such an incomplete version of Beauvoir's philosophy underlines Marlène Bichet's point that the translation process often leads to misrepresentation of Beauvoir's argument (2019, 37). For example, Joó offers a detailed account of these omissions and their effects:

The first part of the French volume containing chapters on scientific facts was translated, but the second part on the literary myths of femininity was completely left out, except for the theoretical-philosophical introduction to the concept of myth and reality in about 16 pages. So the Hungarian reader does not know that Beauvoir provided the first literary studies on Montherlant's, D.H. Lawrence's, Claudel's, Breton's and Stendhal's female heroines...

(Joó 2011, 124)

To expand on Joó's precis, Volume 1 of *Le Deuxième Sexe* was reduced by half, retaining Parts I and II, which could be considered "scientific," and omitting Part III (Myths), the material presenting a literary analysis of myths of femininity. We speculate that the editor of the Hungarian translation, Zádor Tordai, may have considered the literary analysis of patriarchal myth-making in Western literature irrelevant or even threatening to the Goulash socialist ideology – indeed, beyond its Skopos. Genre exerts a profound influence on the way in which readers approach and engage with a text. Indeed, John Frow describes genre as "central to human meaning-making" (2006, 10). It is possible, as Joó suggests, that the Hungarian translation has been incorrectly categorized, because of the target culture's inability or unwillingness to recognize the source text as a work of philosophy: "Beauvoir, however, was not considered to be a philosopher, which could have been the reason for shortening theoretical explanations within chapters translated and for the omission of philosophical references to Levinas and others" (Joó 2011, 125). The Skopos lens allows us to hypothesize that cultural differences and socialist concerns drove the omission or repression of philosophical and literary discussions which were not congruent with the worldview that the political regime was seeking to promote. In his article tracing the complex history of censorship in socialist Hungary, Béla Nővé (2010) sets out the ways in which philosophical and literary texts could be threatening to the regime, far more so than empirical research. He cites the dissident Hungarian author Miklós Haraszti, who explains why creative and conceptual texts were particularly threatening to socialism: "That artistic autonomy could be an end in itself was part of the promise of bourgeois civilization."³

Volume 2 of *Le Deuxième Sexe* was reduced less drastically, offering 370 pages of Hungarian text in contrast to the 660 pages of the French original (Joó 2011, 125). Chapter 4, "The Lesbian," is entirely missing from Volume II, Part I. Part III, Justifications, is also entirely missing, omitting Chapter 11, "The Narcissist"; Chapter 12, "The Woman in

Love”; and Chapter 13, “The Mystic.” The Hungarian translation does not document the omissions. Curiously, the contents page is located at the end of the text (pp. 577–578) and the sections are renumbered so that they run consecutively: Part IV, Towards Liberation, is renumbered as Part III. While the omissions in Volume 2 may be less extensive, Joó points out distortions in the translation which are problematic because of their philosophical implications, rather than being to do with translating into a genderless language:

The French title of the second volume, *expérience vécue* “lived experience,” is a key concept in phenomenology, but the Hungarian translation *gyakorlat* “practice” obliterates the original implied philosophical meaning. In addition, the fact that the third part of the second volume, “Justifications,” is missing from the Hungarian edition seriously distorts the philosophical conception of the whole project. Women, according to Beauvoir’s argumentation, typically tend to justify their being by narcissism, or by love or religious mysticism. “Justification” belongs to the existentialist terminology as well – we can find it in the text translated, but we are left without knowing about its significance as life-styles, ways of life widespread among women.

(Joó 2011, 125)

Beauvoir was known to have read Marx enthusiastically (see Kirkpatrick 2019, 122). Therefore, the use of the term “gyakorlat,” translated as “practice,” may appear to resonate with the Marxist concept of praxis.⁴ In fact the back translation supports Joó’s point, and evidences that Beauvoir meant lived experience of women’s lives in the phenomenological sense, rather than the Marxist inflection. The source text uses the term “*expérience vécue*”; the Parshley translation resonates the original, phenomenological sense by translating it as “Woman’s Life Today,” as does Borde and Malovany-Chevallier’s choice of “lived experience” – a term which continues to be used more broadly in phenomenology (Dahal 2021). The unfortunate Hungarian translation chooses a confusing term in “gyakorlat” as the use of this word in Hungarian is multifaceted; it may mean “exercise,” “practices” or “practical experience.” Joó’s critique resonates with Marlène Bichet’s more recent plea for great care to be taken in the translation of philosophy, noting that “specialised philosophical terminology can be problematic for translation, as philosophical occurrences need to be recognised as such” (2019, 37). In this particular example, the socialist translation strategy overwrites in Marxist terms what Beauvoir intended to be a philosophical insight based on phenomenological concepts.

Focus on “The Independent Woman”

We develop our analysis by focusing on the chapter titled “The Independent Woman.” We decided to focus here because:

The identity of the socialist woman incorporated a new, independent woman who is equal to man, and a traditional woman having a family as her natural destiny, while Beauvoir drew our attention to ambivalences, contradictions and encouraged us [Hungarian women] to notice and experience ambiguity, rather than deny it.

(Jóó 2011, 122)

In our view, this is the chapter that inhabits most fully the fault-lines of socialism and feminism, linking to the historical and ongoing “double burden” for Hungarian women of assumed equality of opportunity under socialism, alongside a deep gender bias about the approved role of women in society as workers or mothers, which to date has not been adequately debated in public discourses.

For example, in the material from *Le Deuxième Sexe* that has been translated into Hungarian, we found problematic translation choices. The French source text uses the term “être sexué” in the sentence that reads “L’homme est un être sexué: la femme n’est qu’un individu complet, et égale du mâle, que si elle est aussi un être sexué” [“Man is a sexed human being; woman is a complete individual, and equal to the male, only if she too is a sexed human being”; Beauvoir 2011, 739.] The Hungarian target text renders this phrase as “A férfi fajfenntartásra alkalmas emberi lény, a nő tan akkor tökéletes egyed és egyenlő a férfival, ha ő is alkalmas a fajfenntartásra” (Beauvoir 1971, 515). We translate this into English as “Man [biologically male] is capable of procreation or capable of racial/genetic reproduction [i.e. to preserve the species], woman is a perfect individual and equal to man if she is also fit for the preservation of the species.” The Hungarian version is striking in its distortion of the source text’s meaning. Rather than asserting the validity of woman as a sexual being, it considers only the reproductive mechanics of biological sex, and positions woman as an individual (not a cultural construct) who is by default lacking unless reproductively fit for purpose. Unlike French and English, which use “l’homme” or “man” respectively to indicate both a male individual and the universal category of human (e.g. mankind), Hungarian has in its lexis two different words to differentiate between a male individual and mankind: *férfi* (a biological man) and *ember* (mankind). We find it notable that the Hungarian translators chose to use the individual term *férfi*, describing a biological male, rather than the conceptual category of man, *ember*. Given that Beauvoir’s text is widely understood to offer “a phenomenological description of the sexual difference” (Heinämaa 1997, 20), we read the French “l’homme” as a conceptual category (man as a cultural construct) as well as a sexed individual, and “être sexué” in the phenomenological sense of lived experience (a sexual being). The Hungarian translation shuts down these existential readings, reducing the sentence to functional, reproductive capabilities.

This decision on the part of the Hungarian translators appears to privilege patriarchal lineage, with an emphasis on male reproductive capability and race/genetics, resonances which seem to prefigure with

uncanny accuracy the right-wing reproductive politics in play in twenty-first-century Hungary (see concluding comments). The relationship between translation practices and their socio-political contexts is complex and contested. Maria Joó speculates regarding the 1968 Hungarian translation that “I would assume that there is a connection between publishing *The Second Sex* and organizing the petition campaign for abortion in Hungary given that the organizers of the Hungarian campaign were women, even though there did not exist any women’s movement, or any larger political movement behind the petition, which was merely a civil act of intellectual opposition” (Joó 2011, 117). It is possible that, rather than the publication of *A második nem* [The Second Sex] leading directly to the pro-choice campaign, the movement was developing anyway and the two events resonated across a cultural moment, even without a causal relationship. The emergence of a pro-choice movement in Hungary around the time of the translation may have resulted in a heavier emphasis on acceptable or praiseworthy women being those who had children, and therefore produced more workers for the socialist state. It is perhaps for these reasons that the Hungarian translation strategy reduces human sexuality to its mechanics. It gives no sense of sexuality as a cultural, nuanced, diverse or embodied experience.

To gauge how notable this translation choice might be, we checked both English translations of *The Second Sex* (Beauvoir 1997 and 2011). Parshley renders the phrase “Man is a human being with sexuality” (691), while Borde and Malovany-Chevallier choose “Man is a sexed human being” (739). We would argue that, despite well-documented issues with both English translations (see Bichet 2019), in this instance both are faithful to Beauvoir’s existential concerns, which Judith Butler summarizes as “To be a gender, whether man, woman, or otherwise, is to be engaged in an ongoing cultural interpretation of bodies and, hence, to be dynamically positioned within a field of cultural possibilities” (Butler 1986, 36). The Hungarian translation seems to create a quite different emphasis on man’s progenerative power and appears to be out of line with two other translations made over 50 years apart in two different cultural contexts.

In the same section, we also identified the complete omission of a passage on nonconformity, which cites homosexuality and adolescent behavior as particular instances of rebellion. The following text is missing entirely from the Hungarian:

On a vu que l’homosexualité constitue elle aussi une spécification : la neutralité est impossible. Il n’est aucune attitude négative qui n’implique une contrepartie positive. L’adolescente croit souvent qu’elle peut simplement mépriser les conventions; mais par là même elle manifeste; elle crée une situation nouvelle entraînant des conséquences qu’il lui faudra assumer. Dès qu’on se soustrait à un code établi on devient un insurge.

(Beauvoir 1949, vol. II, 436)

[We have seen that homosexuality also constitutes a specification: neutrality is impossible. There is no negative attitude that does not imply a positive counterpart. The adolescent girl often thinks she can simply scorn convention; but by doing so, she is making a statement; she is creating a new situation involving consequences she will have to assume. Whenever one ignores an established convention, one becomes a rebel.]

(Beauvoir 2011, 816)

Beauvoir positions homosexuality and adolescent questioning of convention as examples of transgressive behavior which society considers unruly. Joó suggests that the removal of this material reflects “the socialist ideology and prudishness of the official Marxist sexual morals” (2011, 125). Although we agree with Joó, we believe that the final line of the above excerpt offers a more specific clue as to why this passage was omitted from the Hungarian translation. The phrase “Whenever one ignores an established convention, one becomes a rebel” would have clashed with the ideology of “Goulash Socialism,” where ideas of rebellion and otherness were not welcomed. Ironically, “The word [homosexual] was first used in 1869 by a Hungarian doctor, Benkert” (Carlin 1989). Although Hungary decriminalized same-sex acts in 1962 (Szulc 2018), which was relatively early in the European context, nonetheless during the period of “Goulash Socialism,” being homosexual was associated with Western decadence, too much individuation. Szulc (2018) affirms that laws on sexuality and their implementation were complex and differed by country within the Eastern bloc. While Romania did enforce anti-homosexuality laws against women, in most socialist states the laws were only enforced against men, and lesbians were generally ignored. The disapproval was ideological. Dennis Altman observes: “Prejudice against homosexuality as ‘a bourgeois degeneracy’ became strongly imbued in Communist Parties throughout the world” (1993, 227). An identity that is formed outside and without the help of the communal collective would have been perceived as rebellious and threatening to the socialist status quo. The homosexual, particularly the lesbian, was seen as less useful to the socialist state as they would not adhere to the nuclear family and not be as productive in terms of procreating the next generation of devotees to the system. As we have seen, female reproductive capability was emphasized by the Hungarian translators of *Le Deuxième Sexe*. A lack of (re)productivity would have been interpreted as decadent, selfish, and hedonistic and, more specifically, refusing the “double burden” of the socialist woman as worker and wife/mother. The homosexual woman subverts the heteronormative conventions upon which “Goulash Socialism” depended for its workforce: her existence challenges socialism’s and must therefore be suppressed. This may be the reason that the chapter “The Lesbian” was cut entirely from the Hungarian translation. Furthermore, the destabilizing qualities of the

adolescent woman would in 1969–1970 in Hungary have been posed as a “problem” (Ruddick 1991, 102) where the potential for unregulated procreation outside of the control of marriage and the nuclear family would have been actively discouraged.

This is the main reason that we believe the state-approved translators omitted this passage in the target Hungarian. We believe that it is less prudishness and more an ideologically led heavily abridged translation strategy. While adolescence generally carries disruptive potential, Beauvoir writes specifically about the adolescent woman. As we have outlined above, the Hungarian regime would have found particularly threatening the idea of *women* asserting their agency, developing sexual identities and making choices beyond the prescribed model of the dutiful, heteronormative worker/mother. The idea of “making a statement” by refusing to conform to social conventions would have given voice to and offered role models for subversive behavior, disruptive to the socialist regime. The adolescent girl, Beauvoir writes, is dangerous as she can BECOME WOMAN and hence exercises her existential volition to create herself by her actions. She has the agency to produce a new situation, unleashing consequences that she (and society) will have to deal with. Beauvoir’s theory of women’s agency is central to this idea of becoming. According to Elaine Stavro, “De Beauvoir recognizes the complexity of and the structured nature of the forces that militate against transforming women’s situation and the need for collective political struggles to ensure that women become mutually respected agents” (1999, 276). As we have seen in Beauvoir’s own analysis of the “difficult problem” of women in socialism, such struggles for agency would be radically destabilizing for societies whose order depended upon women being “even more enslaved than male workers” (Beauvoir 2011, 151). Without being able to interview those involved with the Hungarian translation choices, we can speculate that the omitted material did not support the Skopos that informed the commission of the translation: particular aspects of women’s agency were especially threatening to the regime, beyond the general disruptive potential of adolescence and the “decadence” of homosexuality as they pertain to all genders.

Conclusion

This brief exploration of the distortions created by an ideologically led translation strategy leads us to our concluding comments, in which we link the omissions from the Hungarian translation with ongoing social tensions in present-day Hungary, and call for a new, feminist translation of Beauvoir’s landmark text to support Hungarian women in their fight for political representation.⁵ Depressingly, as we write, Viktor Orbán, Hungary’s right-wing prime minister, is holding a referendum on anti-LGBT law. This is in the wake of the Budapest Pride march held on July 24, 2021. A cursory internet search reveals a plethora of articles with

titles such as “EU urged to suspend funds to Hungary over ‘grave breaches of the rule of law,’” “EU launches legal action over LGBTQ+ rights in Hungary and Poland,” and “Hungary fines bookshop chain over picture book depicting LGBT families.” Two years previously, Hungarian education came under attack as gender studies departments were forced to close in Hungarian universities. Maya Oppenheim, the women’s correspondent from the *Independent* newspaper, a leading UK liberal daily publication, writes: “Hungary’s far-right prime minister has banned gender studies programmes at universities – with his deputy arguing the area of study is an ideology rather than a science” (Oppenheim 2018). This idea that gender studies is an ideology and therefore needs removing without any consultation from universities is a threat to free speech and liberalism. As Beauvoir’s *A második nem* [The Second Sex] would have been a key component of the gender studies syllabus, we may continue to trace the state’s attempts to silence public discourses on women’s experiences. An ongoing lack of attention to Beauvoir’s ideas (*A második nem* is out of print in Hungary) suits the current political regime very well. The urge to suppress the discussion of gender appears common to both the previous socialist regime and the current right-wing government.

We argued earlier that linguistically, Hungarian has great potential to amplify the source text’s feminist message, but that ideologically driven editing and publication strategies, hostile to alternate worldviews, worked to silence that message. This silencing overshadows the linguistic potential of Hungarian and severely limits the translation’s ability to influence its Hungarian readership. Sadly, with the banning of gender studies departments in universities and *A második nem* [The Second Sex] being out of print, Beauvoir’s ideas and the lineage of feminist thought which they underpin are even less accessible, while at the same time debates on gender are shut down in the public space. The situation for understanding and discussing women’s experience is even more limited than that into which *A második nem* [The Second Sex] emerged in 1968. Fifty years on, under Orbán’s illiberal democracy it suffers the ultimate sly censorship, and is not available to the next generation of learners.⁶

Given Orbán’s myopic and binary view of society with his homophobic, transphobic, and misogynistic policies, we suggest that the role of translated feminist texts in Hungary is more important than ever. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is the European Union knowledge center and provides information for policy makers. The Institute regularly assesses all European Union countries on a points basis out of 100 and plots individual countries’ performances against the European Union average across specific domains including work, money, knowledge, time (spent on caring and domestic work), power, and health.⁷ The 2019 report on Hungary states that the country is progressing towards gender equality at a slower rate than other EU states. Just a quick glance at Hungary’s equality index reminds us how women under Orbán’s regime are becoming worse off:

Hungary's scores are lower than the EU's scores in all domains. Gender inequalities are most pronounced in the domain of power (20.6 points) and time (54.3 points). The domain of health ranks highest (86.6 points), compared to other domains. Hungary's score in the domain of money (71.6 points) has improved the most since 2005 (+ 5.1 points). Progress has stalled in the domain of knowledge. In the domain of time, Hungary's score has sharply decreased (- 6.8 points). Between 2005 and 2017, Hungary's Index score improved but remained significantly lower than the EU's score in the same period. Hungary's slower rate of improvement has led to an increasing gap with the EU over time.

(European Institute for Gender Equality 2019)

Perhaps, adequate translations of feminist thought could offer fertile ground to nurture restorative action; change begins with awareness. Sadly, we have described a less than adequate start to introducing Beauvoir's seminal work to Hungarian readers due to an ideologically driven and abridged translation. We cannot help but think that Hungarian readers were short-changed and continue to be short-changed by the existing translation. As long as there is no press freedom, alongside the closure of gender studies departments, translations of feminist thought will suffer. Andrea Pető, writing in a blog post, comments on the abrupt "cancellation" of MA Gender Studies programmes in Hungary in August 2018:

Never before has a government of an EU Member State sought to legislate the curriculum of universities without consulting the appropriate university institutions. It also sets a dangerous precedent for state intervention in all other university courses violating the Fundamental Law of Hungary 9.1.

(Pető 2018)

As Eliza Apperly writing in *The Atlantic* states:

For the far right, propping up male authority and promoting a nuclear family that sticks to the gender binary are central tenets of the broader nationalist project. By contrast, gender studies promotes a more fluid understanding of self and society, in particular by recognizing gender as something shaped and interpreted by a given social order, as opposed to an immutable biological fact. In questioning traditional concepts of identity, sexuality, and kinship, gender studies therefore destabilizes the far right's simple narrative of a native "us" versus an alien "them."

(Apperly 2019)

While it was for later theorists to write explicitly about "gender," Judith Butler asserts that "Simone de Beauvoir's formulation distinguishes sex

from gender and suggests that gender is an aspect of identity gradually acquired. The distinction between sex and gender has been crucial to the longstanding feminist effort to debunk the claim that anatomy is destiny” (Butler 1986, 35). Beauvoir is therefore a crucial link in the lineage of feminist philosophy, offering a vocabulary for feminist thought and activism in Hungary. Butler’s assertion invites us to suggest that one of the consequences of the current hostility towards any critical discussion of gender roles in Hungarian society (as evidenced by the canceling of gender studies programmes, and the lack of female representation in politics) is the lack of engagement with *A második nem* [The Second Sex], the seminal text of second-wave feminism.

We will conclude by suggesting a new feminist intervention is needed – a feminist retranslation of *The Second Sex*. We would like to believe that Luise von Flotow’s emphasis on the feminist translator’s awareness of her role as political mediator (1991) will be of benefit to the receiving target culture. We agree with von Flotow that “with supplementation in feminist translation, with the difference that the feminist translator is conscious of her political role as a mediator,” change may follow (1991, 75). In tying this back to Skopos, perhaps the proposed new translation could engage a translation strategy that gestures towards a more tolerant and egalitarian target culture, and by working in that imaginary, invite readers to create it.

Notes

- 1 *Magyar Ifjúság*, <https://retronom.hu/node/52873> (date illegible, accessed July 30, 2021).
- 2 Budapest Retrő, www.youtube.com/watch?v=TEjHB38WZbg (accessed July 27, 2021).
- 3 Miklós Haraszti wrote *A cenzúra esztétikája* [The Aesthetics of Censorship], published by AB Independent Publisher, Budapest in 1981. The text was translated into English and published as *The Velvet Prison* by Penguin Books in 1989.
- 4 See for example Florian Radu (1977) writing in Hungarian on the Marxist thinker Gramsci as a “gyakorlat filozofája” [philosophy of practice].
- 5 One example of recent media coverage about the misogyny in contemporary Hungarian politics occurs in the UK national daily newspaper *The Guardian*. An article by Shaun Walker (2018), entitled “‘We won’t keep quiet again’: The women taking on Viktor Orbán,” quotes Andrea Pető, a professor in the Department of Gender Studies at Budapest’s Central European University, as follows: “While others have progressed [with women’s representation in politics], Hungary has stayed in the same place or even got worse since 1990.” She adds that “the country has ranked among the worst in a list of 28 EU nations when it comes to gender equality.”
- 6 It is beyond the scope of this chapter to investigate fully Beauvoir’s relationship with gender studies courses and more recent feminist activism in Hungary. It is for others to take this suggestion further.
- 7 Explanations of these domains can be found on the EIGE website: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-index-2019-hungary>.

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