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Cynical References to Political Correctness in Hungarian Media in the 2000s[1]

Abstract: *In this paper I analyze the strategy in Hungarian public discourse for discrediting feminism in the media in the early 2000s. The strategy consists in the systematic conflation of feminism with the demand for "politically correct" language. My analysis will show that the motivation for the conflation occurs, on the one hand, in the name of tolerance or, on the other, to the determent of feminism. These apparently very different discourses, however, overlap and are effects of the same strategy of discreditation. They both rest on the assumption that feminism is an exclusionary ideology hence it is to be tolerated at best, or to be fought mercilessly. Despite the apparent opposition between the two approaches, their goals are the same. The reduction of feminism to political correctness and its representation as the manifestation of some general practice of 'language cleansing' "benignly" masks the real object of feminist language criticism, namely, sexist and homophobic exclusionary language use and their symbolic and material consequences. These are found everywhere in contemporary Hungary. I shall argue that the alarming similarity of the two perspectives is a recent phenomenon in Hungarian public discourse that emerged in the first decade of the millennium. It replaces the strategy of the 1990s that represented feminism as a matter of some individual and isolated efforts and as such eventually harmless on a social scale. The turn of the first decade re-imagines feminism as a social practice that is argued to be an intolerant or aggressive attempt at purging language use. This change in the meaning of the concept is caused in part, I shall argue, by the stereotypical conceptualization of language use itself. The concept is stereotypical in that it draws on (value) judgments expected to be understood as self-evident hence able to preempt any need for reflexivity on the part of the reader.*

The past ten years has seen a new wave of discrediting feminism in the Hungarian media. It follows the almost entirely hostile responses to the emergence of feminist agendas in the public discourses of the early 1990s. The new strategy consists in the systematic conflation of feminism with the demand for "politically correct" language. The motivation for the conflation occurs, on the one hand, in the name of tolerance and freedom of expression or, on the other, to the determent of feminism. The two modes of conflation replace the strategy of the 1990s that represented feminism as a matter of some individual and isolated efforts of a few lesbian women. Although feminism was reduced to a group of actual feminists charged with a merciless militancy, the fact that they were always represented as accidental and isolated could always deliver the relief that the majority of 'sane' women would be immune to their self defeating efforts. They were represented as harmless on a social scale (Barát 2005). The new wave of discreditation that I am analyzing in this paper re-imagines feminism as a social practice that is argued to consist in purging language use for (disagreeable) political purposes. I am going to show that this change in the meaning of the concept could quickly become dominant in public discourses, in part, as an effect of the stereotypical conceptualization of

[1] The paper is a substantially revised version of an earlier text published in Hungarian in Barát 2009.

language use itself. It is stereotypical in that the discourses on political correctness draw on highly stigmatizing (value) judgments as if self-evident. They may easily preempt any need for (critical) reflexivity on the part of the reader and generate their consent.

Stereotypes and Language Use

One of the most alarming phenomena of language and ideology research in feminist cultural studies and discourse analysis is the dismissal of misogynistic representations of women, or derogatory assumptions and beliefs about women's relation to language, on the grounds of their "stereotypical" nature without reflecting on how those stereotypes come about. Such studies rarely reflect on how and to what end they use the notion of "stereotype" for their analytical category[3]. Ironically, such non-reflexive approaches on the part even of feminist researchers result in turning the analysis of stereotype (including the category of 'stereotype' itself), into hollow concepts that are void of any explanatory power. This non-reflexivity, in turn, makes the (feminist) critical academic discourse all the more vulnerable, especially when what is at stake is its "scientific" status in the eye of the local academic community – which is certainly the case with feminist scholarship in contemporary Hungary.

I see stereotypes as commonplace generalizations that capture the lived experiences and assumptions of a given community. As such, they are the necessary products of categorization practices in a given social and cultural context. The specificity of categorization in/through stereotypes lies in the fact that they make (self)-reflexivity redundant and thus they may function as 'self-evident' (value) judgments manifested in language use. Like all linguistic signs, stereotypes are also embedded in particular systems of value. Consequently, they are effects of power relations and are located at the intersections of different ideologies. This multidirectional, simultaneous constitution enables a stereotype to mobilize the logic of multiple arguments simultaneously and unify conflicting assumptions as (if) they all could be coherent. For representative examples of the prevalent use of stereotypes as shortcuts to thought, let me mention today's civil movements' slogan "Think globally, act locally!" This slogan articulates the relationship between local and global dimensions of life as if self-evident. The complex and often conflicting relationship of the two dimensions, let alone the struggle over what counts local or global for the movement's political agenda, is taken for granted. Or take the Labovian sociolinguistic discourse that above all sees and quantifies gender differences performed in language use as if a matter of self-evident extension of the visible 'speaker's sex.' It then quantifies the instances of speech behavior by frequency of occurrences. On the basis of such stereotypical production of the meaning of 'woman speaker' and 'man speaker' we are invited to read the interpretation of the 'findings' to the effect that "women are expected to be more conservative, and men to be more prestige - oriented." When some 'findings' do not match these ideological

[3] For some telling example of such academic feminist discourse, see feminist media studies of media output, such as TV series or magazines, and their concern about the distortion of women's images. Taking stereotypes as if self-explanatory is especially present in research that assumes a rather straightforward relationship between the media and the audience and draws on content analysis for their methodology (Byars 1991; Tuchman 1979; McQuail 2000). As Sue Thornham observes, "This approach has proved remarkably resilient. At the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in September 1995, we find the Beijing Platform for Action on Women and the media formulating its strategic objectives in terms identical to those of thirty years earlier" (2007, 24).

expectations, we are readily told that some women 'speak like men' or vice versa, reinforcing the same gender polarization. The reiteration of the "self-evident truth" in the (Hungarian) media that "Political correctness is feminist language planning gone mad" is yet another widespread example of the ideological inflection of stereotyping. This can justify, on the one hand, arguments against language planning in the name of free speech, and on the other, arguments for legitimizing the call for–linguistic or physical injury against the 'ideologues' of the language police.

The ideological work of stereotyping leads us to three important points. First, stereotypes are incredibly flexible. Since any given stereotype is at the intersection of several ideological investments in meaning, one and the same stereotype can easily be used to support several conflicting statements. Reversely, we can support an argument by combining a stereotype *and* its polar opposite. An example of the same stereotype used for oppositional arguments would be when those who oppose and those who support racism both argue equally against hate speech regulation by appealing to the universal human right of free speech. An example of the reverse would be when the political requirement of women's emancipation is equally supported by liberal feminist references to the equality of the two sexes as well as by radical feminist arguments referring to the equity of differences – without reflecting on the history of the conceptualization of equity and its (enabling) limits for their own political agenda.

In addition to the flexibility of stereotypes, my second point is that scholarly language/discourse not only uses stereotypes already operating in non-scientific, everyday discourse, but also, inadvertently, produces new stereotypes. Lastly, we do not have to endure such ontological myopia. As my deconstructionist approach to stereotypes should demonstrate, we may go beyond the (self-inflicted) blindness of 'objective' science aimed at apparent 'descriptions' of stereotypes. Given a mutually constitutive relationship between language and reality, a (self-)reflexive approach that entails the production of a critique emerges as a viable strategy to expose stereotypes/stereotyping. The multiple ideological investments of any category (including 'stereotype' itself) in producing stereotypical meaning implies that there are uneven, sometimes even contradictory cracks and discontinuities in the semantic field that make critique (i.e., reflection) viable from a (relatively) distanced position. In other words, while stereotypes limit and exclude, they also hold out the potential to undermine themselves, opening up new perspectives. What is more, the hybridity of stereotypes may also provide an opportunity for dialogue that is a mode of using language on equal footing between participants. They may then co-produce a system of values that goes beyond exclusionary relations of power.

The Discreditation of Feminism in the Hungarian Media in the 2000s

To illustrate the discreditation of feminism in Hungarian media, I wish to cite four representative examples published between 1997 and 2003. Regardless of their political position, all four of the speakers wish to assert their claim that "political correctness is simply feminist idiocy" as a self-evident proposition – in other words, as a stereotypical claim. The examples I shall cite are from periodicals, such as the political weekly, *Magyar Demokrata* and the literary quarterly *Lettre*, and from on-line periodicals, such as the art journal *Bahia* (www.bahia.hu) and the feminist journal *Tűsarok* ('Stiletto') (www.tusarok.org). I have selected them to demonstrate the full spectrum of the existing political stances on feminism in contemporary mainstream media discourse. The first excerpt is from an article written by a male journalist,

Balázs Ágoston. It is published on the occasion of Woman's Day in *Magyar Demokrata,* which represents the most right wing of the spectrum[4].

> In the United States, the land that spawned the idiocy that is called "political correctness", a man can easily find himself in court accused of sexual harassment for checking out an attractive woman. *In other words*, men are PUNISHED in certain places FOR ACKNOWLEDGING BEAUTY AND HARMONY. We *hardly need to explain* how absurd that is. (Literal translation. All translations by the author.)
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> A "politikai korrektség" nevezetű idiotizmus szülőhazájában, az Egyesült Államokban, szexuális zaklatás vádjával könnyen bíróság előtt találhatja magát az a férfi, aki szemügyre vesz egy vonzó nőt. *Azaz*, egyes helyeken BÜNTETIK, HA VALAKI ELISMERI A SZÉPSÉGET, A HARMÓNIÁT. *Talán nem kell különösebben ecsetelnünk* ennek az abszurditását. (Ágoston, March 6, 2003)

The male voice above claims that he has a right to catcall women on the street in order to show his alleged appreciation for their beauty. Women's Day propagandizes against such a view. But, the journalist abuses Woman's Day only to associate it – indirectly – with political correctness that is defined (incorrectly) as an idiotic idea of US origin. This particular representation of sexual harassment as political correctness gone mad ultimately discredits feminism. The implied logic of this argumentation depends on the reader's familiarity with the history of Woman's Day. The reader is expected to know that the event was introduced in 1910 to promote equal rights, including women's suffrage. At the same time, the authorial voice automatically attributes beauty to women. The logic of argumentation pulls these two statements together and represents political correctness as an overly zealous and unjustified defensive reaction to what comes to be implied as 'female essence'. According to the logic of the argument, political correctness is absurd because it considers as sexual harassment something that should be seen as intrinsic to 'manly' admiration of the equally intrinsically adorable trait of 'womanhood'.

The journalist's logic draws on the "self-evident" misogynist tradition in European thought: the figure of the immanent bodily matter of woman subjected to the transcendent intellect of man.[5] His ontology is, in fact, essentializing and reiterates what Rosi Braidotti and Judith Butler (1994) argued to be a political institution, a norm to be oriented towards as an ideal, while entailing unequal, relative losses on 'both' sides:

> The price men pay for representing the universal ['human'; 'neutral'] is a loss of embodiment; the price women pay, on the other hand, is at once a loss of subjectivity and a confinement to the body. Men become disembodied and, through this process, gain entitlement to transcendence [the intellect] and subjectivity [agency]; women become over-embodied and thereby confined to immanence [matter]. (1994, 38)

The second excerpt is from a critique on Frida Kahlo. It makes use of the same ideological strategy of equating political correctness with feminism. However, this time the author is a woman called Edit Száraz. She is an art historian and critic who

[4] It has been published on various extreme right wing websites and blog spots since its original publication in 2003.

5 See for the critique of contemporary Hungarian sociolinguistics for adopting a similar disposition when conceptualising the body in Barát 2009.

seems to be an "insider", and "knowledgeable" of the history of feminism and feminist art.

> The 1980's was an era of militant feminism in Western Europe and America, of women blatantly trying to become men, of relentless, careerist proletarian amazons, and self-loathing, men-hating, paranoid and spoilt hysterics. Sickly, unkempt women were screaming on the streets of New York and European cities in a constant rage, waving photographs of blood and torture at passersby, children included. The soft-spoken, delicate, elegant curators of galleries and museums were suddenly substituted by crude domestic workers because the principle of quality was abandoned for quantifying laws and percentages. Artists were now being chosen not by their merits and the quality of their work, but by their sex. Let there be 50% men and the same amount of women at every exhibition in the name of political correctness. These proportions soon changed to favor women even more, and now we are overrun by exhibitions that only showcase the work of female artists.
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> Az 1980-as évek Nyugat Európában és Amerikában a militáns feminizmus kora volt, a minél otrombább férfivá válni akaró nőé, a gátlástalan, törtető proli-amazoné, az öngyűlölő, férfigyűlölő, paranoiás, elkényeztetett, hisztérikáé. New York és az európai nagyvárosok utcáin beteg, elhanyagolt külsejű, permanens dührohamban szenvedő nők ordítoztak, véres tortúrákról készült fotókat mutogatva a járókelőknek, *köztük a gyermekeknek*. A galériák, múzeumok addig halk szavú, finom, elegáns kurátorait nyers modorú takarítónő-típusokra cserélték le. Feladták a minőség-elvet, helyette egyszerű számtani törvényeket vezettek be. Százalékolást. A kiállító művészeket nem tehetségük, munkájuk minősége, hanem nemük alapján választották ki. A politikai korrektség jegyében 50% férfi és ugyanannyi nő legyen minden kiállításon. Az arány gyorsan felbillent a nők javára, s elszaporodtak a kizárólag nő-művészek munkáit bemutató kiállítások. (Száraz, August 31, 2000)

The woman author evokes her so-called "knowledge'' of feminism to "defend" "high culture" and the "quality" of art galleries against the straw person figure of under-educated, working class women artists. Needless to say, her position is contrary to feminist scholarly concerns about the gendered and gendering effects of the high/mass culture divide that stereotypically associates popular culture with 'women'. The work of stereotyping here consists in reducing the notion of gender as a principle of differentiation to a physical attribute instead of seeing gender as a social relation of power. In short, the ideological work of stereotypes reduces feminism to a neo-conservative woman-centeredness[6]. It is also important to underscore that this trail of logic depends for its sweeping claims of hostility on pure fabrications of art "history". The alleged quota in art galleries and institutions has never been an existing rule. Nor should any quota necessarily mean loss of quality.

The third excerpt is taken from *Lettre*, which, with its transnational editorial board and editorial policy, is furthest on the political spectrum from the view voiced in *Magyar Demokrata*. It is a contribution by a female philosopher, Ágnes Heller, who returned to Hungary after the system change from the US, the country that is traditionally presented in the Hungarian public discourses as 'the' home of feminism:[7]

[6] For a discussion of the conflation of feminism and woman-centeredness in the 1990s in Hungary see Barát 2005.

[7] For a detailed discussion of the fixation of the automatic linkage between feminism and the US in the Hungarian media in the 1990s see Barát 2005.

> John Gross, in his criticism of American culture, points out – rightfully, I might add – the narrow-mindedness of "political correctness". Political correctness is not only politically small-minded and asinine, but also shows the complete lack of humor, irony, skepticism and distance in the culture in which it operates. This attitude comes from Puritanism, and Puritanism from Europe; yet, political correctness is still a foreign body in European culture. Many may try to emulate it, but it is not going to take root. European feminism, *for instance*, will never be like American feminism, simply because no attitude could ever become dominant in Europe for long. Although Puritanism comes from Europe, it has always coexisted there with many other different orientations and attitudes, which always disowned and ridiculed the belief in one universal "correctness".
>
> Az amerikai kultúra bírálata során John Gross, szerintem helyesen mutat rá a „politikai korrektség", a PK bornírtságára. A PK nemcsak politikailag szűklátókörű és ostoba, de jelzi a kultúrának, amelyben működik, olyan sajátosságait, mint amilyen a humor, az irónia, a szkepszis és a distancia iránti érzék hiányát. Ez az attitűd a puritanizmusból eredeztethető, a puritanizmus pedig Európából. A PK mégis idegen test az európai kultúrában. Bár sokan megpróbálják utánozni, mégsem fog gyökeret verni. Az európai feminizmus *például* sosem lesz olyan, mint az amerikai, egyszerűen azért nem, mert Európában egyetlen attitűd sem válhat hosszabb időre dominánssá. Így a puritanizmus, bár Európából származik, ott mindig együtt élt számos más, eléggé eltérő orientációval és attitűddel, amelyek a maguk részéről mindig tagadták és nevetségessé tették az egyetlen egy „korrektségben" való hitet. (Heller, 1997)

Heller's voice is far from the hostile and aggressive charges against feminism in the other two excerpts. She doesn't address any particular issue in the history of the women's movement or feminist scholarship. She 'simply' calls political correctness □ and by extension, feminism □□ asinine. She attributes narrow-mindedness to the fact that political correctness and feminism, mentioned as one of its instance, are specifically puritanical American ideas. However, next to the hysterical comments by the first two speakers, her comments come off as almost reasonable. The reader hears only her disinterested voice for 'evidence' supporting that political correctness is an act of feminism gone too far. The relationship between political correctness and feminism seems a matter of accidental parallel. The speaker's detached voice focuses the argumentation on political correctness. Feminism is articulated as a 'foreign body', though only one of the many similar attitudes in the 'inherently' pluralist cultural landscape of Europe. Feminism is mentioned as a particular example of the attitudes that make itself ridiculous for their rigidity in the flexible mind of the 'intelligent' European educated public. I argue that, as a result of the intertextual division of labor across the three excerpts, Heller does not need to make the exclusive conflation of political correctness to feminism. The foregoing examples may function as an ideological shortcut and, in turn, also save the face of the journal *Lettre* and the reputation of the philosopher herself as 'tolerant'. The name of the author may also function as a symbol. The reader of a journal like *Lettre* is expected to be familiar with Heller's stand on feminism, defining it as an ideology of the past, which has achieved its goals. The intertextual link produces the ideological stereotyping of feminism as if a matter of self-evident knowledge to be shared by the reader.[8] I think the central metaphor of the *Lettre* excerpt, namely that political correctness is a 'foreign body,' can be seen as a covert linkage with feminism that resonates with the explicitly sexist essentialization of 'woman' to body in the first excerpt.

[8] See on this line of argumentation in Barát et al. 2004.

Insofar as the loosening of the link between feminism and political correctness may be seen as an opportunistic use of intertextuality, I find such use disturbing precisely because it is articulated by a serious and outstanding philosopher whom I would never judge by the same criterion as the authors of the first two excerpts, who are essentially hacks. The ideological gain of intertextuality is two-fold. "Thanks" to the flexibility of the stereotypical intertextual links in the argument, the female philosopher's voice comes to be positioned as "civilized" and thus escapes having to "cry feminism" explicitly in relation to political correctness as the aggressive voices in the previous two texts do. This civilizing of Heller's position makes, in retrospect, the other positions even more violent, almost rancorous in tone. On the other hand, she also foregoes the risk of others crying "feminist" at her simply because she has "divulged" the phrase in a detached manner.

The fourth excerpt is taken from an interview with Katalin Lévai, a Hungarian Socialist Member of the European Parliament. It represents an allegedly favorable disposition toward feminism, the least stigmatizing perception of feminism on the political spectrum.

> T: […] What do you like best in the EU?
> LK: The fact that the language of political correctness is used as the mother tongue of the Union to such a degree that, hopefully, they really mean it. I find it extremely easy to communicate there because I don't have to begin every conversation by convincing others that the subject we're discussing is important. You will never see debates like what occurred the other day in a circle of seemingly enlightened intellectuals in Hungary, where a woman took the floor and said that in her opinion women without children are worthless. You cannot say something like that in public in Europe, or rather, no one does.
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> T: Mi az, amit te az Európa Unióban olyan nagyon szeretsz?
> LK: Azt, hogy a politikai korrektség nyelvét anyanyelvként használják, és olyannyira, hogy remélhetőleg már úgy is gondolják. Nekem hihetetlenül könnyű ott kommunikálni, mert soha nem úgy kell kezdeni a beszélgetést, hogy meg kell győzni valakit arról, hogy amiről beszélünk, annak a szükségessége egyáltalán kérdéses volna. Nem fordulhat elő egy olyan vita, mint például egy felvilágosultnak tekintett értelmiségi körben itthon a minap, ahol felszólalt egy nő, és elmondta, hogy szerinte az a nő, akinek nincs gyereke, az nem ér semmit. Európában nyilvánosság előtt nem lehet ilyet mondani, illetve nem mondanak ilyet. (sisso, [2003.03.13. 10:53])

In the light of the hostility expressed against feminism by the first three authors, we may argue that Lévai gives credit to feminism in its relation to political correctness. Nevertheless, there is not a single even remotely explicit reference to feminism when she is presenting political correctness in favorable terms, which she argues feels like one's "mother tongue". To me this silence about feminism is ironic, given that before she was elected to the EU Parliament she had been a feminist sociologist. So she should be aware that her negative example about women with no children is an instance of the EU's policy of gender mainstreaming, which is *not* feminism. Gender mainstreaming is articulated in the voice of the "policy oriented" conformist politics of the European Union, which uses the language of equal opportunity. The major problem with gender mainstreaming is that it collapses talking about actual women and criticism of the conceptualization of 'woman' and their structural position in/by a given institution. The EU's expectation of feminist scholarship is reduced to delivering "good practice". Such a requirement puts

emphasis on how to resolve a problem, pushing the agenda of feminist research to be directed to policy. This criterion sits uneasily with the demands of critical feminist scholarship which is interested in exploring what is named the "problem" and for what reasons. That is, feminist critique is interested in exposing hierarchical gender relations of power and not in providing reformist remedies for the status quo. The question is not so much what other "correct" expression one would use as *why* one would want to use it at all.

The Difference a Critical Feminist Position May Make

The four excerpts above, including the interview with Katalin Lévai, who during the past decade or so has practically figured as the icon of the "feminist politician" in Hungary may articulate the nexus of political correctness and feminism from four different aspects, but they all employ the same strategy of stereotyping feminism itself. *None of them include indirect or direct references to any existing feminist definitions of political correctness*, even though this can reasonably be expected. Certainly, from a politician who is a gender expert and claims to use political correctness as her native language and from a philosopher who is an expert on American and European intellectual history, a more precise formulation of terms is expected. Both should be familiar with feminist scholarship – regardless the authors' actual stance on feminism.

The derogatory conflation of feminism with political correctness is not an idiosyncratic phenomenon in Hungary. It is part of a global tendency that emerges in the 1990s in the UK and US. In Chapter 4 of her 1995 volume, *Verbal Hygiene*,[9] Deborah Cameron discusses the history of the notion of political correctness in British and American society in great detail. In the British and American context feminism is represented in the 1990s as if a movement of thought police, fighting for non-sexist language. This hostile representation generated polarized responses from feminist scholars. Some went on the defensive and argued that their main concern is not to exclude anyone, men or women, but give them equal recognition through 'gender inclusive' terms. Cameron argues that it is a self-defeating position in that it domesticates its own political agenda in an attempt at presenting its representatives as if uncontroversial promoters of "gender-free" language. This position undermines the efforts of the feminists who take issue with the dominant charges of authoritarian thought police and associate themselves explicitly with a political commitment against hetero-patriarchy. One of these feminists is Deborah Cameron. They differentiate between feminist criticism of sexism in language and political correctness which is no more than a cynical gesture making an institution or a particular speaker look more liberal than they actually are. Cameron argues that we should not get caught in the counter-effective logic of the polarized debate. It is not important whether or to what extent accusations of the "idiotic" language cleansing crusade of political correctness emerge as blatant slander aimed at the British political left, including feminism. *What is important is to examine why such discrediting campaigns are so successful today.* In other words, in the social debate arising from the general language cleansing movement, there is obviously much more at stake than decontextualized word lists.

An important difference between Cameron's approach to political correctness and the Hungarian strategies is that the Hungarian discourse of political correctness

[9] Cameron, D. 1995. *Verbal Hygiene.* London & New York: Routledge, 116-65.

makes no actual references to the political left. It seems like an absolute taboo, despite the fact that the term *political* in "political correctness" implies a political motivation for linguistic interference in disparaging speech. It seems the two positions equally want to discredit left politics by silencing it. The representatives of conservative politics does not even try to suggest that political correctness can be anything else other than an aggressive Orwellian newspeak-norm devised by some evil feminists trying to regulate language behavior; either by force or by some magic wand that turns political correctness into an internal urge. Nor would the liberal voices go beyond seeing feminist politics more than an act of symbolic concession one can make without running the risk of losing their political privileges. Therefore they present politically correct language use as a matter of replacing one word for another. The cumulative effect of the two positions is that the political aspects of language use are dogged by the dominant discourses in the media and is dismissed as an evil or short-sighted feminist agenda.

In a later work Cameron (2006) provides the example of 'parental instinct' suggested to replace 'maternal instinct' and asks the embarrassing question:

> But how could there be a non-sexist expression for a concept that is inherently sexist? The idea of an 'instinct' to nurture children acquires 100% of its meaning and force from a sexist frame of reference which attributes this "instinct" to women. Detached from that frame [in terms of "gender free" logic], the whole concept becomes meaningless – why would we use it except to assert that female biology is destiny?" (2006, 25)

How can we unravel the stereotypical logic that persistently connects political correctness to feminism and, at the same time, bring up the question of why there is such a determination to discredit it? How do we abandon the logic of discrediting, scapegoat-searching exclusion and unveil the ideological operation of the stereotypical discourse? First and foremost, we must state that when we talk about meaning, and the articulation of the variety of meanings, *we are talking about the logic of discourses and not individual words.* The critical study of language use and discourse has never been about whether something is politically correct or not; it examines whether a given statement is sexist, and hence misogynist, or not, and whether it is heterosexist and hence homophobic, or not. To reduce such concerns to a matter of "politically correct" word lists, as is implied by Lévai's comment, is to reduce the problem to mechanics. If being fluent in the terms of political correctness as in one's mother tongues implies a "domestication" of a productive critical feminist inquiry, nothing has been gained. On the stage of national and global politics, making feminism palatable and reducing it to polite language use, as Lévai would have it, ultimately results in the elitism of middle-class, university educated women brought on by the implementation of "gender equality" in line with the European union's requirements of gender equality policy.

Conflating feminism with political correctness also simplifies the meaning of feminism itself. There are several things going on here. First, feminism, in an ironic twist, gets turned upon itself. Then, as a corollary to this, by the force of the same reductionist logic, feminism becomes further conflated with actual feminists. They are the cautionary figures of the militant, terrorist stereotype, who themselves are allegedly engaged in hate speech in their raving mad efforts to cleanse language.[10]

[10] This figure has been with us since the Hungarian political system change. For a mapping of the semantic in the 1990s, see Barát et al. 2004.

The logic of ideological stereotyping collapses feminist practices, feminist perspectives, and its practitioners as if they were all one and the same thing.[11] Finally, the plurality of feminisms also comes to be collapsed into another stereotype. Feminism is basically argued to be a homogenous "ideological" thought of US origin manifest in its attempts at regulating language use. The tolerant and the conservative positions differ only in the intensity of their stand. According to the liberal perspective articulated by Lévai, political correctness is argued to mean inclusive language use. This tolerant position, ironically, preempts the possibility of grasping the specificity of any difference. According to the conservative position voiced by Balázs and Száras, a male journalist and a female art critic, respectively, there is open hostility to political correctness and feminist discourse. They are charged with complete eradication of differences of gender that threatens with blurring the boundaries of traditional gender relations. The anchoring of feminism in the United States severs the feminist agenda from its historical context. Then, this ahistorical, flattened concept of feminism can be conveniently used to support completely conflicting value judgments – depending on whether the speaker agrees with the endeavors associated with political correctness or not.

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[11] A persuasive argument for the importance of distinguishing between the three aspects, i.e., feminist practice, perspective, and individuals, can be found in Imelda Whelehan (1995, 216-37). She argues that the propagation of 'post-feminism' in British and Northern American media is insupportable.

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