# Question of the private lives of female teachers<sup>1</sup> in the light of the Hungarian press published at the turn of the century

#### ZSUZSANNA MÁRIA TAKÁCS

#### Abstract

Families belonging to the Hungarian middle class often had their daughters enrolled at the teacher training colleges, because these provided them adequate education as mothers, and if needed, they could even get jobs. The discussion about the right of teachers to private life, that is, to marriage and family, and if these were realized, about the suitability for teaching, developed in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century further continued in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The focus of the research in this case not only is the change in the count rate of teachers on the field, but also the evolution of their marital status.

**Keywords:** female teachers; private life; Hungary; 19-20<sup>th</sup> century

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#### Introduction

"Literacy rate of peoples is defined by the fact that how the given nation respects women, which is really right; because the innocent woman is not more than a chain link, which connects the ordinary fallible mortals to the angels of the sky." – this can be read in one of the issues of the Néptanoda journal of Pécs (Pethő 1894, 190). The aim of the present study is to show the changes of the last two decades of the 19th century, the changes that took place in relation to the teaching career with the increasing rate of the presence of teachers, which counted as a turning point regarding the higher school qualification and employment of women. The process of the employment of women, as one of the most important elements of the social changes of the end of the 19th century, first half of the 20th century, stands in the focus and inside it the intellectual career, the teaching profession, where women appeared first, in a bigger number, and which was

<sup>1</sup> In the Hungarian language there is a special word for female teachers. This study examines the private lives of female teachers, so where the word 'teacher' or 'teacher training' is used, these women are meant. Where a distinction is necessary between male and female teachers, I refer to them accordingly.

accepted by society among certain circumstances. The main question at this time was, however, not necessarily the suitability of women, but the question of women staying at their career regarding the change in their marital status, marriage and having children of their own.

## Studies of female teachers

The first institution in Hungary serving the studies of female teachers, the educational institution established by the English Ladies in the Pest convent for their own order members started training in 1855. Here, until 1861, the training of nuns teaching in the order's schools happened entirely in German, then partly Hungarian, then from 1864 entirely in Hungarian (Kiss 1929). The two-year study was ended by written and oral qualifying exams with the participation of the County Council Commissioner, this exam was successfully taken by about 30-40 female teacher candidates annually. In the following years trainings were launched in the royal Roman Catholic female teacher training institutions of Satu Mare (1857), Oradea (1858), Kosice (1860) and Sopron (Ursuline convent, 1864). In these institutions until 1868 about 600 female teachers received their qualifications (Kiss 1929. 19.).

In the second half of the century, 15-16 000 teachers could be found in the area of the country, about a fourth of them did not have any qualifications. In the period between 1856 and 1867 a total of 4978 male and 364 female teachers can be found with suitable qualification, but only 25% of them had head teacher, the others had lower elementary and lower teacher qualifications (Kelemen 2007. 64.). The provision XXXVIII of 1868 on folk school education brought another change in the area of teacher training. Chapter VII of the law, from sections 81-115, is related to teacher training institutions. Training time was raised from two to three years and prescribed on the area of the country to establish twenty state teacher training institutions as well as prescribed the admission conditions of the institutions. In section 86 we can read about the criteria of admission: "Teacher training institution can admit such able bodied students who are over 15 and have at least as many skill in mother tongue, counting, geography and history as are taught in secondary grammar schools, real schools or in the 4 first classes of civil schools. The student who wants to be admitted must either show a public school (stampless) certificate about these skills or undertake an admission exam."2 According to the regulations of the law, only that person could be a teacher who had a degree about his qualification. Section 41 disburdened them from tenure of office that weighed on them so far, but was not compatible with the teaching profession. The number of teachers and students taught by them increased enormously between 1868 and 1919. In the historic Hungary the number of students rose from 1.15 million to 2.51 million, while the total number of their male and female

<sup>2</sup> Legislative act XXXVIII of 1868 on folk school public education. In: 1000 év törvényei. https://net.jogtar.hu/ezer-ev-torveny?docid=86800038.TV [01.02.2024.]

teachers from 17800 to 34500 (Donáth 2008. 4.) In the era of dualism, the rate of maintainers of teacher training institutions therefore also changed, though Catholic denomination kept its leading role regarding the number of training institutions and students studying there. The number of (female) teacher training institutions rose from the initial 39 to 89 in the era and the share of maintainers in the training evolved the following way: while in 1868-1869 59% of (female) teacher training institutions was maintained by the Roman and Greek Catholic Church, 23% by the Lutheran Church, 8-8% by the Calvinist and Greek Oriental Churches, 2% by the Israelite community of faith, in 1917-1918 this rate changed and about 33.7% of the teacher training institutions was maintained by the state, 42.7% was maintained by Roman and Greek Catholic Church, 8.98% by Calvinist Church, 7.9% by Lutheran Church, 5.6% by the Greek Oriental Church, and 1.12% by the only one Israelite training institution (Donáth 2008. 4.).

In the period beginning from 1868 the number of training institutions kept growing, both regarding state and denominational institutions. In 1868 34 male and 5 female teacher training institutions functioned in the country, their number was by the end of the dualism era, in 1918 already 91 (51 for men and 40 for women), by 1929 this reduced to 48 due to territorial changes. In the following tables we can see the division of training institutions regarding state and different denominational maintenance between 1868-1929 In the period beginning from 1868 the number of training institutions kept growing, both regarding state and denominational institutions. In 1868 34 male and 5 female teacher training institutions functioned in the country, their number was by the end of the dualism era, in 1918 already 91 (51 for men and 40 for women), by 1929 this reduced to 48 due to territorial changes. In the following tables we can see the division of training institutions regarding state and different denominational maintenance between 1868-1929 (Kiss 1929, Donáth 2008).

# "Aim" of teacher training

"Many parents have their daughters enrolled at teacher training, because it is a pretty good institute of girls' education. [...] this is the institute that is the most suitable for educating girls, preparing them for life. It educates learned women, who are worthy partners of men in family life, in raising children and if necessary, in promoting living." – we can read it in József Kiss's writing in 1928 regarding the Hungarian teacher training (Kiss 1929). The families belonging to the Hungarian middle class often had their daughters enrolled at teacher training institutions, because these provided suitable literacy for them even as mothers, and if necessary, they could even get jobs with this. Vilma Steinitser wrote in 1895 in Pécsi Napló: "15-20 years ago a father of a girl thought this way. A girl does not need education. She should learn how to cook and bake, learn from her mother how to harden the husband's collar, how to treat children, and if in addition she can play a waltz on a piano and learn somehow to read and write, this is totally enough. Today, fathers' view has changed and rightly." But she also draws the

attention to the fact that "the behaviour of the father of today is not right, either", since the girls' education should meet a dual purpose, not to fail in their future family and they have to learn, "to make a living possibly on their own as well" and she thinks thereby the number of the so-called "marriages of convenience" and "divorces" would be less. (Steinitser 1895, 6)

The number of students in the teacher training institutions rose rapidly until the 1880s, then after a small setback started again to rise from the mid-1890s, to which the maintainers adapted with enriching the number of the institutions. Thus the number of students in teacher training institutions<sup>3</sup> was continuously rising: in 1893 1324 persons, in the school year 1899/1900 3252 persons, in 1918 already 6838 students, future teachers continued their studies in the schools. Regarding the gender ratio of the students in the institutions it was first in 1913 that number of students in teacher training for women exceeded the number of students in teacher training for men and among them the rate of students in Roman Catholic institutions was always bigger from 1895 than 50% of students learning in all the institutions (Kiss 1929, 37). Namely, that knowledge that was mastered by the future teachers in the training institutions - such as pedagogy, knowledge concerning children and economic knowledge, needlework, music, singing, as well as religious education -, was considered by the parents as useful for future wives and mothers. These thoughts were valid not only for the end of the 19th century and the turn of the century, but we can even read them at the end of the 1920s in József Kiss' writing that since "women are born to treat and educate. Not only in the family, in the school, but also in life, in society has she educated for subtlety, nobility, a purer perception of life.[...] Mostly it can be noticed if a woman teaches little boys, on the boys' gentleness, manners, behaviour" (Kiss 1929, 60).

Appearance of women in teaching career - as read in reports and regulations of the Ministry of Religion and Public Education -, was being continuously supported by the government, calling the settlements to hire them already from the 1870s, though with the regulations it also acts against the fast rise in the student number of teacher training institutions. From 1874 it can be read: "villages need to be enlightened about the usefulness of female teachers and their attention has to be called to hire them and take steps to hire women to teach girls and smaller boys, while male teachers should be hired to educate and teach older boys as suitable for their profession" (Kiss 1929, 45). The rise in the number of teachers can be observed throughout the dualism era, but it can also be seen from the number of students graduated from training institutions and the rate of those getting jobs that most of the families took advantage of training in these institutions as girl educating institutions - as a school preparing for later mother careers. In the next two tables we can see the number and rate of those de facto working as teachers in the era4 among primary school tutors, as well as the number of those graduated with a degree and those getting a job in that year (Kiss 1929, 48-50):

<sup>3</sup> About the teacher training institution and its students in Pécs see details: Takács 2016.

<sup>4</sup> In this topic see also Takács 2014, 101-110.

	Number of tea- chers (male)	Number of teachers (female)	Rate of female teachers %
1869	17106	686	3,85
1881/1882	20207	2189	9,78
1889/1890	21604	3304	13,27
1899/1900	22743	5886	20,56
1909/1910	22980	9004	28,15
1913/1914	23358	11174	32,54
1914/1915	14693	11463	43,82
1917/1918	13956	13016	48,28

Table 1. Number and rate of teachers in Hungary

Female teachers	Graduated with degree (persons)	Rise of the number of female teachers	Those not getting a job
1882	387	188	141
1896	357	276	27
1900	844	288	409
1914	1072	389	405

Table 2. Number of graduated female teachers in Hungary

When filling female teacher positions, we must not forget that most of the Hungarian society wanted to see a man at the teacher's desk, on the other hand a very small proportion of female teachers accepted to fill a job in vacated places in smaller villages and homesteads (Pethő 1988, 28). "...[The] world view of men and some of the women do not welcome women in breadwinner careers. They raise many objections against it. They do not want women's fight for bread, living. They fear that women in this fight lose their femininity, their enthusiasm for higher feminine, family and so social and national ideals. They find it an unlucky situation when a man and a woman are contrasted with each other in a fight for bread" - József Kiss writes at the end of the 1920s (Kiss 1929, 3). We can read it in the period between the two world wars, while Antonina De Gerando worded in her request to the house of representatives of the Hungarian Parliament in 1888 that if "in America, Switzerland, England and now in France and Italy people are getting more and more convinced that only a woman can educate. I do not think that a Hungarian woman is blessed with less talent than an American, Swiss, English, French or Italian woman." (De Gerando 2006, 119.)

# The press and women's education

Already at the establishment of training institutions writings were published among writings in the Hungarian press that were about education in these institutions, or rather about giving opinions on them or in general about educating women. In the columns of national journals appearing in the second half of the 19th century writings were soon given spaces about women's education, teaching girls, but also the local press products provided opportunity to this topic and the discussion about it. Beside the question of educating women, the articles on women's getting jobs appeared soon. "In the long 19th century the wording and unfolding of women rights intertwined with the gradual spread of education serving family and national interests. (...) the parliament and press at the end of the century (...) are loud from the fact whether women who were educated (in schools giving totally or almost the same training as men) have the right to appear on any breadwinning career, to decide upon the evolution of their lives (...) on their own and to have a say in decisions of political and economic life." - Katalin Kéri writes in her writing (Kéri 2015, 234.). Among breadwinning careers women who obtained qualifications in teacher training institutions established by the public education law in 1868 and then spread in state and denominational training appeared in slowly. but surely growing number in the elementary folk schools.

The development of press at the end of the century was parallel in whole Europe to the spreading compulsory education and so had a more and more powerful effect on forming the opinions of population who were reading in a bigger and bigger rate. Hence writers who were speaking in topics that concerned many people appeared at the same time in the slowly developing role of formers of public opinion, public thinking. As Katalin Fehér writes, the aim and at the same time the task of printed press is to raise awareness, inform the public and form its opinions in questions concerning many people (Fehér 2005, 7.; Takács 2017). Beside the education of women, we can find opinions on women's employment in not only the Hungarian press of the era but also in European and North-American press. In the second half of the 19th century these writings multiplied, beside the articles that appeared in the press, shorter studies, books appeared in the topic, since the process went together with the development of women's emancipation movement.<sup>5</sup>

From the 1860s on, the problem of the employment of women appeared in a bigger and bigger extent in families of the Hungarian middle class. So it was not by accident that the legal regulation of women's education became an important part of educational policy modernization directed from above and those school types were established – teacher training, upper girls' school and then secondary grammar school for girls giving school-leaving exam and assuming university education of women – that were in the service of this case. Writings about women's profession, women's destination could be connected to mainly such persons who insisted on traditional values and did not agree with women's employment and the emancipation movements (Kéri 2008, 46). Still, we can find persons supporting

<sup>5</sup> More about the topic see chapters of Kéri 2018.

women, persons who saw the process of development in it, though in smaller number, but they also released their thoughts. Starting from the 1880s, writings about women in the press almost could not be separated from discussions, opinions on their education and employment. (Kéri 2018)

Daily and weekly journals published in Pécs regularly reported articles connected to the Hungarian education, situation of pedagogues, especially that of elementary school ones, besides, writings regarding women's education, their rights to it, girls' education can also be found in all of the journals. Néptanoda, which was published in 1867 in Pécs and it became the pedagogical journal of the town (Szántó 1988, 6.). Pécsi Napló (Pécs Journal) was first published on 16<sup>th</sup> November, 1892, as the non-party political newspaper of the town, and as the first daily newspaper of Transdanubia united with the only one-year-old Pécsi Újság (Pécs Newspaper) in the summer of 1894 and the Pécsi Figyelő (Pécs Observer) in 1874.

Among the publicists of Néptanoda, which became the official journal of the Association of Teachers of Pécs and its Area in 1898, were not only male writers, but also writings of female teachers undertaking the task to write were given spaces in the columns of the journal. (Néptanoda 1898, 95.). However, in 1894 when the teacher training institution opened its gates in the town, János Pethő wrote the followings in an article about teachers-to-be: "A good teacher and a good mother cannot be one person (...) If a teacher gets married, her supply has to be made by the man and so she does not need any separate profession; this profession must rather be given to someone else by the state, to someone who has nobody to be cared by, who has no bread, but has skills (...) you cannot expect from a 18-19-year-old girl to teach 15-year-old unruly adolescents" (Pethő 1894, 191). This thought was not a new one and characteristic not only of Pécs in the era, but even in decades before this it had been a topic of serious discussions in our country and in other European countries, too, and many such regulations had been born that affected the private lives of teachers. Getting married and having children raised doubts in many from the beginning whether as wives and mothers they would be able to perform their tasks both in physical and in spiritual senses, and beside this it was also a fundamental question that by doing this they take away breadwinning from other breadwinners, namely the male teachers. The public education committee made a provision in 1881 in Budapest, according to which "teachers employed in the schools of the capital should not be allowed to get married, a married teacher should lose her profession, and henceforth teachers should only be employed if they have no husbands" - the article in Pécsi Figyelő writes (Robin 1881).

The study of Vendel Lakits, director of a girl school in Óbuda, written under the pseudonym Aladár Cserfoki, discusses this provision and writes the followings: "... it is not the money that the replacement costs, but the educational disadvantage coming from the absences talks against married teachers and teachers with children [...] indicating pedagogical disadvantages coming from absences gave me the pen to write, just as the public educational committee discussed from pedagogical viewpoints this question and told its opinion in the case of women, especially married and mother teachers." (Cserfoki 1881, 12., 17.) This

opinion is shared by the above-mentioned János Pethő, who wrote the followings in his article: "...as soon as a teacher got married she ceased to be a teacher; secondly, it would be right to order that teachers can by no means be employed in undivided mixed schools." (Pethő 1894, 190.) To justify this, in his writing he emphasizes the role of the state in maintaining families, according to which "Family is the well-source of a state's life, the state must foster this well-source and the breadwinner, provide bread and support in every task and protect in rights." Regarding the employment of teachers and all other female employees he notes that "the state does not solve its task in this respect if a big part of the authorities of the country is filled by women." - he writes fifteen years later and after the provision in the capital and the national reaction to it (Pethő 1894, 190.). Also in one of the issue of Néptanoda in 1895 a short description was published with the title If teachers get married, about the Prussian educational measures, which again reports to the readers that in Prussian schools "the employment of teachers ceases at the end of the term of the school year if they get married, that is, they have to resign, because the housewife and mother tasks are incompatible with school tasks" (Néptanoda 1895, 64.). Besides, the journal reports a case in Esztergom in 1899, when a teacher, who got married, was dismissed, and they only wanted to employ someone who is unmarried, but this was not approved by the minister, because there was no legal regulation for it. According to the justification "a woman if she gets married should be a housewife, mother of her children and if she meets these expectations, cannot be a good teacher at the same time and anyway, what she gains at the toll, loses at the customs. (...) And why were women let public careers? To be breadwinners if they do not get married. But how could those women who do not get married become breadwinners if the jobs are kept occupied by those who got married? (Néptanoda 1899, 322.)

Another article appeared in Pécsi Figyelő: "The teachers themselves protested against this strange provision (...), that the respected wise men of the public educational sub-committee overshot the mark a bit. (...) Let us create a new celibacy! - it continues - Let us create secular nuns who are allowed concubinatus, but not the decent family life...! Who are allowed to visit Ferenczi Café with a lover on their arms, but are not allowed to enter in front of the altar and swear eternal fidelity to those they love. Because the way is this. If a teacher is forbidden to get married, she will be forced to seek happiness on sideways and once someone stepped onto these sideways we can never know where she stops. (...) The viewpoint of moral is decisive in the question." (Robin 1881) As we can see, the answer to the main question is not the women's right to work and not that as an individual can freely practice her right to every field of private life, but the moral life of a teacher. How does the society judge a young woman who finds a partner but is not married? This question got to the central place of answers to the regulation because a teacher shows an example with her whole life to children taught by her and appears as an example in front of the given community as well, according to the perception of the era. A central element of the education in

teacher training is the moral education of future teachers. In connection with this Sarolta Geőcze said regarding teachers of teacher training institutions of both men and women that a teacher's "private life should come up even the most delicate moral requirement and faithfully fulfil his or her patriotic and social duty in his or her everyday life" (Geőze, 1912, p. 218). Ida Regina Dittler wrote the followings in 1905, after the turn of the century in Néptanoda: "The character of a teacher should be pure, noble proud, inaccessible that a pupil should be perfect also seeing her example." (Dittler 1905, 135.)

#### Conclusion

In writings born in the 1880s and 1890s and at the beginning of the century we can see that the employment of women, beside raising the question of the competence of women to learning and doing intellectual work, appeared as a problem also in another area, their rights to their private lives. Pro and con opinions were created to the question whether women can cope with as wives and mothers in the world of work, in a teaching career already accepted at social level by that time, not only in Hungary but also in those countries where women became teachers. The aim of this study was not to examine only one journal comprehensively and systematically, but by selecting from the press of a town to present what questions and answers were given to the reading society of the era, when they took the local journals into their hands. The general tendency embracing the country can well be seen by examining the writings published here, too.

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<sup>6</sup> About the moral education of teacher training institutions see in details Takács 2017 and Takács 2020.

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