This paper is very much a report on research in progress: it will list some preliminary observations, but they are not yet integrated in the current discussions on censorship or language and gender. First, I will provide an outline of the background to the research topic, then I will summarise the methodology of the project and work carried out so far, then the preliminary observations pertaining to the gender aspect of the research, and, finally, I will present the methodological difficulties I have encountered.

The current project developed from a problem presented to me by a Czech academic when I was collecting material for my doctoral research on the discourses of gender in pre- and post-1989 Czech culture. I interviewed a Czech historian of sports on some issues concerning the work on the history of Czech physical educational movement. The conversation digressed from the presentation of these relations in the textbooks for students of physical education to general issues of academic publishing and authorship under state-socialism. The historian touched on some issues I suspected as a student reading those textbooks in the pre-1989 times, and on some I had not previously considered. What I did suspect was that any academic had to impose restrictions on her work in terms of ideologically suitable topics or particular expressions creating the impression of a world clearly divided into the “good”, that is, state-socialist world and its values, and the “bad”, that is, capitalist world and values. What I had not considered or known were problems concerning authorship and institutional structures of academic publishing during state socialism. In many ways, the relationship between the two was much tighter then, than we are used to under democratic conditions, although I am far from believing in the independence of authorial creation of institutional structures. The author then had much less autonomy over her work than now: every piece of writing was subject to multiple approvals and interventions. This particular historian did not even have the power to decide whether he allowed a piece of his writing with substantial changes inserted by his superior to be published or not. These conditions resulted in a blurry concept of authorship and – of course – in self-censorship.

After this interview, I became sensitised to the instances of censorship, self-censorship, and the author’s relations to language, text and audience in the pre-1989 period. It was the structures and mechanisms of publishing in social sciences and humanities which most intrigued me. Certain amount of censorship and other restrictions must have existed also in hard sciences, but the ideological grip on them was considerably looser, the access to Western literature was better there, and professional travel abroad was also less restricted. It follows that, on average, Czech hard sciences participated in international debates in their fields to a greater degree than social sciences and humanities. Moreover, social sciences and humanities make a better case for illustrating the effects of state-socialist ideology, because of being under tighter control. I did not concern myself with either literature or media, the two usual subjects of studies of censorship. I had two reasons for this: one, a number of studies or
anecdotal accounts of censoring mechanisms in state-socialist countries has been published and my research would not add much new; and two, while all printed materials were subject to prior approval of a censoring authority before 1968, the law on print regulation imposed after that date related only to media, not to academic work, which makes the case of academic publishing all the more interesting.

**Normalisation in the Academy**

The period of state socialism following the Soviet invasion in August 1968 is commonly referred to as Normalisation. The term was used by the official propaganda of the time to connote a return to “normal political development” after the “crisis development” leading toward the Prague Spring of 1968. Most researchers now adopt the term to refer to the whole period from 1968/69 to the political changeover in November 1989 and this is how I also use it.

I will briefly mention the development in the Czech academic world during that time. The beginning of the period (approximately between 1969 and 1972) was marked by extensive political purges of academic institutions (both research institutes of the Academy of Sciences and universities) of individuals associated with the reform process of the Prague Spring. Research teams were disbanded, institutions re-structured, journals ceased publication, individuals lost work, were transferred to non-teaching posts and/or banned from publication, and other restrictions and sanctions were put in place. Overall, tighter ideological control was imposed on academic research and publishing. This period is characteristic of expelling the more outspoken personalities of the Prague Spring from the Communist Party, and cancelling the membership of others, as well as increasing the propagandist agitation against opportunism, anti-communism and other tabooed concepts in all media including scholarly publications, and of drawing lists of so-called “nomenklatura” academic departments and positions.

As to the purges within the Communist Party, being expelled from it usually meant a ban of work in one’s field and a ban on any public appearance of the name of the person including references in learned publications (that meant that books had to be withdrawn from circulation – if they were in public libraries – if the given person so much as written an introduction to the book or was listed as its translator; of course, no references to the work of that person and her work were possible by other scholars). If somebody’s membership was cancelled, however, that implied lesser sanctions: such a person often could continue working in her profession, although she might have had to change jobs, and sometimes was even allowed to continue publishing and even teaching. In one source, I came across the number of 70,000 expelled party members and 400,000 membership cancellations in all occupations and spheres of life in Czechoslovakia.

The propagandist agitation seemed to have different focus in the different periods of Normalisation. The press media of the time – scholarly publications, Party press and dailies – seemed to have been rallying against anti-communism and opportunism, while promoting consolidation in the first years after the invasion (approximately until 1973). The following two years seemed to have focused on combating provincial conservatism (maloměšťáctví) and promoting atheism.

Finally, “nomenklatura” departments or positions meant that those included under this category had to be filled only with Party members, that is those, whose membership was confirmed after the comprehensive vetting in 1970-71.

Very generally, it can be said that the situation in the academy began to ease a little from the mid-1970s, although there were great variations between environments and institutions, which frequently depended on personal rather than strictly ideological factors. After approximately 1975, contemporary press looses focus on particular few issues, which can be seen either as a
sign of ideological relaxation or of intellectual despair and monotony. I will not try to analyse this aspect now, but merely mention that this situation changes only in the very last years of Normalisation, approximately from 1986 in response to Gorbachev’s perestroika. Careful articles suggesting, but not specifying, the need for change, for “new approach” appear more and more frequently. It is typical that the theme of change remains vague.

Throughout the Normalisation period, there was no official institution supervising the ideological purity of publications. Rather, that was ascertained by the nomenklatura personnel in the supervisory positions I mentioned earlier and, most importantly, by spreading the atmosphere of vague threats in case of ideological transgressions. The former meant that all material leaving an institution to be published, had to be approved by a supervisor: the department or institute head, and sometimes by other people – such as a Party official at the institution or the Party headquarters. The latter resulted in various degrees of self-censorship. My research so far has not discovered a pattern of sanctions imposed on somebody for something one had written. The sanctions seem to be retributions for one’s political views and activism (such as one’s participation in the Prague Spring reform movement), rather than follow an ideologically controversial publication. This seems to be different from the situation in, for example, Ceaucescu’s Romania (Vianu 1998) or even in Hungary where academics were persecuted following the publication of a particular work.

**Methodology**

I have suggested something about my research method in the background description, and at this place I would like to give an account of the work I have conducted so far. The main body of material will come from semi-structured interviews with academics who published through official channels during the Normalisation era and whose work is respected by their peers still today. This criterion is meant to exclude those people who did little more than toe the party line at that time. Instead, I am trying to capture those people in my sample who tried to produce good research but had to cope with the censoring restrictions. That means I am also excluding people who published outside the official presses, in underground, *samizdat* publications, and thus did not have to consider censorship in formulating their thoughts. The people in my sample represent more or less the “grey zone”, as Jiřina Šiklová (šiklová 1992) called it. It is a snowball sample – my informants recommend further scholars at the end of their interview – and its size will eventually be between 20-30 people, of which fifty per cent will be women. As you can see, gender is not my primary focus, however, it was planned from the start as one aspect of the study.

The interview questions are divided into five areas: professional history, publication barriers, self-censoring strategies, text “coding” strategies (some studies talk about “Aesopian language”), and current approach to their texts produced during Normalisation. Each interview lasts on average one hour, although it needs to be emphasised that particularly the interviews with women tend to be longer.

The question of what other sources of information about academic publishing during Normalisation to examine had been a difficult one to resolve. The main reason is that since officially there was no censorship, there are minimal records of publication barriers. What evidence there is is mostly anecdotal in memoirs of prominent academics of the time published after 1989. Testimonies of censorship in contemporary publications such as the *Index on Censorship* cover mostly fiction and the media. In the end, the most reasonable choice seemed to be the Open Society Archives in Budapest which house the collection of Radio Free Europe. There I found newspaper clippings and copies of whole articles from official publications on the structure of social sciences, the role of social sciences for state-socialist ideology and their tasks, the role of academic research and teaching, as well as reports on research conducted at that time. In other words, these sources provide the official formulations of the state-socialist ideology, the propaganda, as well as give a picture of the
institutional organisation of social sciences and humanities, types of publications and the main research topics. The material from the interviews – essentially memories - can be then read against the background of the official rhetoric and structures of the time.

However, I will just mention as a note in the margin, that there is no simple comparison or correspondance between the two sources: their comparison reveals gaps and silences, spaces in between. For example: If I ask my informants about how they knew what they could write about, what language to use, what topics or words were tabooed, the answer is usually vague: “One just knew from being in the environment.” If I mention those articles on the ideological importance of social sciences, the informants of course know the authors – and despise them as “normalisers” – but they say that they never read any of these articles. This raises important questions about censoring and self-censoring mechanisms, through which I am only beginning to work. I am hoping to find some supportive material and evidence in the readers’ reports from two main academic publishing houses of the time – if I find those reports, that is. It seems from my inquiry so far, that the editors and post-1989 archivists considered these documents of so little importance that they were not kept or at least not catalogued.

Survival Strategies of Women Academics

I have so far conducted twelve interviews, seven of which were with women and I will talk today about some preliminary observations from these interviews. The women were philosophers, sociologists and historians. Five of them are still teaching, two are retired, but still affiliated with the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and conducting research. I will talk about two kinds of differences I observed so far between the interviews with men and with women: the differences in their attitudes to the publishing situation during Normalisation and the differences in their attitude toward my research and the interviewing process. I should make a note at this point of saying that it is far more difficult to find women who published during Normalisation than to find men and also, those women who did publish have generally fewer publications than the men.

Asking anybody about any of their activities during Normalisation is in itself a sensitive issue. Therefore, in the interviews, I deliberately do not ask about the informants’ political activities, because this angle could damage my primary intention of finding out about the publishing mechanisms and factors influencing the creation of an academic text. I do not ask either about their Party membership or whether they signed Charter 77. Nevertheless, it is useful to note the political affiliations of my women informants, however imprecise my findings may be, as they create a background against the women’s strategies for academic survival. It seems that of the seven women, five or six were members of the Communist Party at some period of their lives: the membership of three of them was cancelled in the first Normalisation years (that is roughly between 1968 and 1970), and of these one later became the Charter 77 signatory and was actively involved in the dissident circles. It is only this one woman who encountered severe obstacles in having her work published: she could not publish under her own name after 1968 and resorted to pen-names for as long as this practice did not put the publisher in danger (the publisher, of course, new her real name). After she signed the Charter 77, she was not able to publish even under a pen name and continued publishing in exile publication from then on. The remaining one or two women belonged to the younger generation – they were either students or close to graduation in 1968 - entered the Party at some point during Normalisation and remained members until 1989. I can say that only one woman of my sample so far had with certainty never been a Party member and this woman even had some informal contacts with the dissident movement.

Considering the political history of these women, particularly those, whose Party membership ended after the Soviet invasion, their coping strategies are remarkable. They differ from those of the men I interviewed – or at least, the women’s framing of their experience then differs from the men’s. All of the men would be cautious about their research topic and choose only
such areas of research which they would perceive as ideologically neutral, or at least would try and avoid sensitive issues. For example, a historian would shift his focus from the 19th century to the Middle Ages, or from political to economic history, but they would still aim at academic recognition in their fields and make themselves visible by publishing and reaching out to larger or important professional audiences. The women, however, would not only pay attention to the neutrality of their topic, they would also take steps toward making themselves invisible, withdrawing professionally. They would seek out low-profile jobs, often including a lot of routine research. The women whose party membership ended after the invasion, did not wait, unlike the men, to be fired from their jobs, but resigned from their positions and sought employment in a different professional environment: for example, a historian became an urban sociologist, or a sociologist found a job among economists. They explained that that was one way of surviving: moving to a different circle of people from the one in which they were known. It is interesting that this strategy seemed to have worked even in such a small environment as former Czechoslovakia or even in the academic community of the city of Prague.

The women’s own explanations of the strategy of withdrawal and invisibility contain elements of both, self-preservation (that is, to keep the job) and resistance to the regime (that is, not wanting to contribute to anything that would make them feel politically and morally compromised). Three of the men and two of the women held teaching positions during Normalisation (three more women from my sample were banned from teaching after 1968). While the men would dutifully talk about their research, when I asked about it, the women would often divert to their teaching experience and place more emphasis on that part of their academic career during Normalisation. From the context of the interviews, it can even be inferred that they made associations between their unambitious approach to publishing and the importance of keeping their job in order to teach: they did not want to write anything that would earn them a ban from teaching. The most striking example is a philosopher who, on the surface of things, was a loyal Party member until the November 1989 changeover. Yet, for fear of losing her job and the opportunity to teach, she did not dare to publish and wrote almost exclusively "for her desk drawer".

My major concern in this research is the use of language: we know that there were, on the one hand, certain buzz words and phrases which had to be used to make a text ideologically acceptable, and, on the other hand, certain words and phrases that were not acceptable – either to the eyes of whatever unofficial censor or to the author herself. I also suspect, and there is anecdotal evidence for that, that some phrases were used as “codes” for the reader to draw attention to the argument that followed, or to veil and divert the attention of a potential censor from the substance of the text. At this point I have to admit that this part of my research is not going at all well. I have not collected sufficient material yet to discern a pattern in the language use, let alone to be able to draw conclusions about the differences in women’s use of language. Perhaps I will still be able to gather the material, but I have to mention that the women I interviewed found it hard to come up with concrete answers. At best, I got answers like: “We had great fun in our team with the language we had to insert into our research reports”. There is no specification or listing of examples, though. Very occasionally, the informant says something like “I did not want to write ‘socialist society’ so I always wrote ‘our society’”. This lack of information points to the wider issues of memory (that is, it is hard to summon one’s memory after thirteen years), the politics of remembering (that is, it is compromising to think of one’s ideologised use of language), and the appropriation of ideology (that is, the ideologised phrases became a ‘second nature’ then, so the informants are unable to reflect on them, especially when they now live in an environment that uses language differently).

**Informants’ Approach to the Interviewing Process and to the Research Subject**
I am now getting to the second set of observations: to the gender differences of the informants to the interviewing process and to me as the interviewer. I already noted in the introduction that the interviews with women tended to be longer than those with men. That is connected to another difference and that is the scope and context of their answers. Men were more likely to relate the issues they talked about to themselves. Women, however, much more frequently placed their answers within a broader societal, structural of philosophical context, even though my question may have been about their own experience. Their accounts, quite in agreement with Carol Gilligan’s classical argument in *In a Different Voice* (Gilligan 1982), showed a broader scope and they were more relational. Not only that they saw themselves in relation to their environments and particular conditions, but they also described relations between elements and not necessarily centring those relations around themselves. As a result, the interviews with women tended to be more informative.

Perhaps the explanation of the differences between the structure of the stories I get from women and those from men lies in the gender of the interviewer in the sense that the women were more likely to open up in front of another woman, while with the men I felt that I was merely a junior researcher to them. However, the differences can also be caused by the composition of my sample so far: the women were professionally oriented toward sociology and philosophy, while the men were historians and philologists. Hence, some differences may balance out after interviews with men-sociologists. That could then explain also a difference in the attitude of the informants toward my research topic. So far it seemed that the women cared more about it, they approached it in the way that it is important that their story gets told and sometimes said so. The men were more likely to take the approach that they were helping a younger researcher, but showed little interest in the topic – with the exception of a typical question: “Which discipline does your research fit into?”

Before I relate my observations to methodological problems I encountered, I will conclude the account of the preliminary observations by two points for which I do not have a suggested answer. I mentioned at the beginning of this paper that almost all of the women covered in their answers their belonging to the Communist Party, even though I did not ask about it. Interestingly, none of the five men so far volunteered information about their Party membership and it cannot be deduced from their answers either. The second point concerns feminist consciousness of the interviewed women: of the seven women, I approached only two of them because of our acquaintance from gender studies and feminist projects. Nevertheless, all seven women expressed either feminist or at least gender-difference-conscious views during the interview. Perhaps that would not be so surprising in a society with developed feminist discussions, but it is something worth noting in the Czech environment due to the post-1989 debates on feminism: a number of articles were written then on the rejection of feminism by Czech women and on the fact that women in the Czech Republic perceived themselves as equal (Havelková 1993; Šiklová 1998; Šmejkalová-Strickland 1994).

**Conclusion: Methodological Problems**

By way of conclusion, I will mention some methodological problems I have encountered. The first problem has been simply to find the women informants. As I noted earlier, women seemed to be more frequently in positions in which they did not publish so much, or they themselves did not attempt publication. Another reason for this difficulty has been that when I ask an informant – whether a women or a man – for recommendation on further interviews, they rarely think of a female colleague – even if I specifically ask for recommendations on women. This issue makes it more difficult to analyse the interviews with women from the perspective of language use in the printed text, while it provides more material about the circumstances of research life during Normalisation in general.
The second problem, at which I also hinted elsewhere in this paper, is related to memory: it is difficult to obtain concrete instances of censorship and self-censorship not only at the level of a word or a phrase, but often even at the level of a topic. This made the intended second stage of the research impossible. I was planning to ask the informants to find several paragraph-long examples of their own work, in which they used what is sometimes called the “Aesopian language”. That means, a word or a phrase which was used with the intention to mean something else or to serve as a protective “shield” placed in front of an ideologically potentially sensitive point. I then intended to identify a group of readers of these texts, who would be recruited from my generation or slightly older, that is, people who were either students or junior academics in the last years of Normalisation and would be the likely audience of these texts. They were to read the excerpts I would have collected from my informants and mark if they felt the texts contained “Aesopian language” and how it was used according to them. This practice of looking for codes or hints against the political regime has been described in fiction and theatre (Hilský 1994; Moss 1995) and is often hinted at as existing also in academics. There, however, it has not been researched. There is another problem which made it difficult to proceed with this stage of the research and that is that even if my informants remembered that they did use language in this way, they never sent me anything even after several reminders.

This brings me to the third methodological problem. It is related to the work profile of my sample: they are all busy academics. They did not send me examples of their work not because they did not want to, but because it required time, looking into old and, for them, now dated and often forgotten publications, printed before the computing age, which makes text reproduction tedious. The informants’ busy lives also affect the time allowed for the interview. The one hour, for which I designed my questions, seems to be the maximum that I can expect to get. Several informants began to look at their watch after about forty five minutes or even earlier. The limited time for the interviews means that there is not enough time for the informants to start thinking about the issues in which I am interested, although I always offer and frequently do send my questions in advance. I ask about things which were almost “natural” because they were imposed by the entire social and political environment; they are not reflected by the informants now and the circumstances which produced them disappeared, so it is doubly difficult to reconstruct the situation. The chances for a second interview are next to zero if the informants are not personally involved in the research, which they rarely are. Although, I may be able to go back particularly to some of the women who seemed to care more about the research subject and ask for commentaries on my interpretations. This possibility then remains open.

I am not sure, however, if I manage to resolve the fourth methodological problem: the gendered language use. I was hoping to be able to explore possible differences in men’s and women’s use of language in relation to the censoring structures. So far I do not have enough material even to start worrying about how I would go about analysing such an issue methodologically.

Coda

All those constraints make it all the more difficult to research possible gender differences in the publishing practice. Apart from that, I am told – usually when the tape recorder is not running – that gender did play a part in academic research and publishing: that it was “all different anyway”, that it ‘all” depended on who was after whose wife – but what that “all” included is not made clear.

References:


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