Paedagogica Historica, 2013
Vol. 49, No. 1, 111–125, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2012.744065

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

RESEARCH ARTICLE

'Since when are we, mothers who raise their kids themselves, dopes?' Debates on women's emancipation in Belgian educational television programmes for women (1954–1975)

E. Flamez* and B. Vanobbergen

Department of Foundations of Education, Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium

(*Received 31 August 2012; final version received 23 October 2012*)

This research explores political–educational debates regarding the concept of women's emancipation in women and family programmes on Belgian television between 1954 and 1975. From the very beginning, the women's episodes were regarded as explicitly educational. The episodes were created to increase women's participation by means of their emancipation, but simultaneously continued to underline women's segregation from men. Therefore, we want to reveal the paradoxical effects of this emancipatory educational project for women. This paper takes as its starting point the debate about the concept of women's emancipation in the episode 'From home economics to state home economics' in 1964, in which the emancipatory notion was used explicitly for the first time in the women's episodes. The highly debated status of this concept in viewers' letters to producer Paula Sémer is intriguing. Women's emancipation had very different meanings based on the viewers' various cultural and ideological backgrounds and their positioning in discourse. Consequently, the letters reveal a highly ideological tension and therefore deepen our understanding of women's emancipation as a normative, political and historically constituted concept. This helps to understand how different (political) actors have used this episode and concept to establish, maintain and traverse borders separating not only men from women but also emancipated from non-emancipated women. In spite of the emancipatory project, limits were established by 'closing' womanhood in terms of a proposed ideal of 'emancipated womanhood', linking women's individuality to the collective and the state and simultaneously gendering the notion of citizenship.

Keywords: women's emancipation; citizenship; television; segregation; conceptual history; visual history

> "How should we interpret women's emancipation? Does it mean: to earn like a man, to fulfil an equal profession with equal payment, and to attain an equal certificate? – Or does it mean to have more respect and appreciation for the vocation of the housewives who are recognized as the heart of the family, who devote themselves to the education of their children to make them 'good'?"[1]

On 31 October 1953, the TV channel NIR/BRTN launched its first official programmes in Flanders (Belgium). Their aim was the education of a large portion

*Corresponding author. Email: evelienflamez@hotmail.com
[1]Viewer's letter VKAJ, 6.1.1964.

of the public, for which they produced a variety of programmes for different communities. It was assumed that "by its illustrative force and its unequalled power to appeal, television has the capacity to increase the cultural level of hundreds of thousands of people."[2] The mass media were thought to "play an educational role […] on behalf of the growing awakening of our community".[3] This educational mission was not restricted to an elite minority: "There is not one layer of population that is not directly addressed."[4] The programmes sought to disseminate a middle-class discourse and to represent a series of cultural norms and ideals for the whole of the Flemish population. As the pivot in the home, women received special attention.

A number of episodes for women were broadcast on a weekly basis and classified in the "Department of Cultural and Educational Episodes". They were situated inside "the strictly educational domain of adult education", which was all about "education and training for the mentality of a national and world citizen".[5] It was assumed that in this domain there was "a lot to do […] more specifically regarding social promotion, permanent training and meaningful leisure activities".[6] Remarkably, educational episodes addressing men in general did not exist – notwithstanding the presumed importance of adult education. Apparently, it was taken for granted that in the process of becoming a woman taking responsibility as a citizen in a state, she would need specific guidance and support. The question, then, is how an educational project for women differentiated from men was legitimised and conceptualised. In this respect, the notion of *women's emancipation* appears to be the bottom line. However, the understanding of this notion remained unclear. Meanings of women's emancipation were continuously challenged, both inside the women's episodes themselves and in interaction with viewers. Women were not at all passive receivers who concurred with the multilaterally visualised emancipatory discourse. On the contrary, their appreciation or criticism of the episodes and the messages within was stated in numerous viewers' letters addressed to producer Paula Sémer.

Therefore, this contribution seeks to understand the debate regarding the conceptualisation of women's emancipation in the context of the 1960s in Flanders. As a popular medium, television, with its women's episodes, became an instrument of utmost importance in women's education and simultaneously an instrument in governing the population's perception of the emancipatory notion. This emancipatory concept has been challenged ceaselessly in the past, and consequently it should be questioned continuously in the future. Where the notion was deployed especially for women and homosexuals in the 1960s, it nowadays appears in relation to debates regarding the multicultural society. But however frequently one speaks about emancipation, the meaning of the concept itself is rarely touched upon as a starting point for debate.

The aim of this paper is to challenge the self-evident appearance of the concept. By analysing women's episodes and viewers' letters, the (political and ideological) debate on the emancipation of women is expounded and the unobvious nature of

[2]Bert Leysen, 1958. In: Bal, N. (1985). *De mens is wat hij doet. BRT-memoires*. All of the quotations in this text have been translated from Dutch to English.

[3]Vandenbussche, Annual report VRT 1967.

[4]Annual report VRT 1967.

[5]Annual report VRT 1955-1956, 3.

[6]Annual report VRT 1966, 170.

the concept is demonstrated. We will show how aiming at emancipation implied a form of control by linking women's individuality to the collective and the state, and thus had not only a liberating but also a disciplining and normative effect on women. Our research reveals how emancipation was and is an equivocal and instrumental concept and bears witness to an ambivalent way of dealing with social diversity and an ambiguous attitude towards alleged discriminated groups. It concerns a discourse underlining assimilation as a means for integration and liberation. In the case of women's emancipation, the emancipatory ideal created a group of women actually wanting to adjust to the proposed emancipatory ideals. Consequently, the emancipatory educational interventions thought out and pre-structured within the contours of public space did not necessarily mean that women also experienced this public space from such a power perspective. On the contrary, women were part of the process of conceptualising their own emancipation. This paper will therefore question what exactly was meant by emancipatory education in regard to women in Flanders during the 1960s, how this was conceptualised and how it was deployed as a governmental concept in women's education.

Women's episodes: An emancipatory educational project?

From 1954 to 1966, the educational project for women took shape in the women's programme *Women's Mirror/Penelope*,[7] which constitutes the main source for this article. From the VRT visual archives, 29 of the currently 606 retained *Penelope* episodes were selected for our analysis.[8] In order to contextualise the episodes, 'visual history'[9] was combined with research in the 'department document and archive management' of the VRT and interviews with Paula Sémer.

The educational project for women was explicitly related to the formation of a national identity and citizenship: women received "education and training for the mentality of a national and world citizen".[10] The responsibility of women as citizens in the state was connected to ideas "about women and the role presumed proper for them. It was also about the family and about men and men's roles in

[7]The name *Penelope* in succession to *Vrouwenspiegel* was certainly not an arbitrary choice. It referred to the ancient Greek legend of the beautiful Penelope, who was a desirable wife for several princes in Greece. The name of the television programme therefore suggested an obvious connection between beauty and marriage. Young women were appreciated according to their potential qualities as a wife and mother. Consequently, the name *Penelope* was highly paradoxical, considering the emancipatory intentions of the programme.

[8]The selection was done by means of analysis of the titles and – if available – summaries of the episodes. This analysis resulted in the construction of a number of categories: on the one hand the construction of categories was based on theoretical considerations regarding educational paradoxes (Depaepe, Simon, and Van Gorp, 2005); on the other, the central concepts in thinking womanhood at the time were important points of departure. Per category a number of episodes were analysed. M. Depaepe, F. Simon and A. Van Gorp, ed, *Paradoxen Van Pedagogisering. Handboek Pedagogische Historiografie*. (Leuven/Voorburg: Acco, 2005), 511.

[9]Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing. The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*. (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2001); Peter Burke, ed, *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001); Ulrike Mietzner, Kevin Myers and Nick Peim, *Visual History. Images of Education*. (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

[10]Annual report VRT 1955-1956, 3.

Table 1. Active female population in Belgium (Vandebroek, Van Molle, 2010).

	Active female population	Total of women between 15-59 years old	Percentage
1947	820,916	2,725,104	30.12
1961	932,825	2,691,194	34.66
1971	998,991	2,767,518	36.10

public and private life; about nation and nationalism; about the 'civilizing mission'."[11] These ideas emerged in a context of increased prosperity in the 1960s and of continuous improvement of material and technological conditions. This raised women's consciousness, resulting in a society in which it became more acceptable for women to work outside the home – or, at least, it was assumed that it became more acceptable for women to choose whether or not to take paid jobs.[12] Table 1 shows the increase in the active female population in Belgium from the end of the Second World War onwards:[13]

However, this conception of "active" is a rather narrow one, focusing solely on paid labour outside the home. Consequently, these numbers do tell us how many women were "working", but only according to a very specific and limited definition of work[14] – which is, in turn, closely linked to a very specific and limited definition of emancipation.

At the same time, girls' enrolment in secondary education increased. In the school year 1947–1948, the population in secondary education consisted of 41% girls and 59% boys. In 1957–1958, ten years later, the number of girls had increased to 45%;[15] by 1970–1971 it had increased again, to 48% girls.[16]

This development triggered society to rethink and debate women's alleged problems. In women's organisations in Flanders, the result of these debates regarding

[11]Rebecca Rogers, *From the Salon to the Schoolroom. Educating Bourgeois Girls in Nineteenth-Century France* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 1.

[12]In this scope, some juridical evolutions are also worth mentioning. After the Law of April 30th 1958, which abolished women's juridical inefficiency, a second theoretical equality was installed in the Law. Fatherly power was replaced by parental power, but with preponderance for the father.

[13]Of this percentage, only 15.4% of married women worked in 1947.

[14]Hannelore Vandebroek and Helena Van Molle, "The Era of the Housewife? The Construction of 'Work' and the 'Active' Population in the Belgian Population Census (1947, 1961 and 1970)," *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* XL(1-2) (2010): 51–83.

[15]P. Baelde, *De beginnende democratisering van het secundair onderwijs in België, 1945-1958. Een kwantitatieve en interpretatieve analyse*, Verhandeling aangeboden tot het verkrijgen van de graad van licentiaat in de pedagogische wetenschappen (Leuven: KUL, 1997).

[16]The relatively higher increase of girls in secondary education was the biggest in "Middelbaar Onderwijs" (in contemporary Flanders, this is called Algemeen Secundair Onderwijs or General Secondary Education): there, a doubling of the number of girls occurred, in comparison to an increase in boys of only one third. In "Normaalonderwijs" (these schools offered education for and training of teachers in the making) too, the number of girls increased more than the number of boys. From the 1970s onwards, girls' participation in secondary education continued to catch up with boys' participation and by the beginning of the 1990s, girls had cleared their arrears. Ann Severeyns, *De democratisering van het secundair onderwijs in België, 1958-1970. Een kwantitatieve en interpretatieve analyse*, Verhandeling aangeboden tot het verkrijgen van de graad van licentiaat in de pedagogische wetenschappen (Leuven: KUL, 2004).

women's emancipation[17] was that they started to open up scope to think of women's roles as relevant for the public sphere, rather than only finding their importance inside the private domain of the family.[18] A 12-week strike in spring 1966 at FN Herstal and ACEC in Charleroi[19] not only resulted in the requested "equal payment for equal work", but also triggered a debate regarding women's labour. At the same time, Belgium got its first female minister, Marguerite De Riemaecker-Legot,[20] who called the increasing frustration with a group of housewives "the undeniable price to be paid for emancipation".[21] As a consequence,

> the reconfigured family that emerged from the after war period played a central role in political debates about citizenship and formed the basis of a new social order. The messages women received from educational practices in the post war period could lead to responsibilities that were not limited to private life.[22]

In this context, what did it mean for women to be emancipated? The simple answer would emphasise that emancipation meant rejecting motherhood and domesticity as the only appropriate female roles and instead taking paid labour outside the home. However, as historians, we know this simple answer is inadequate. It fails to register the diversity of ways in which these women engaged in both public and private life, and thus the diversity of ways in which women themselves conceptualised and experienced emancipation. The organisation and development of episodes for women not only helped to forge the Flemish domestic woman, but also opened the way to imagining the new – emancipated – woman.

In Flanders, positions in these debates were highly intertwined with the then existing division of public opinion along political and ideological lines and the schooling debate of the 1950s. Like the notions of feminism[23] and citizenship,[24] the concept of women's emancipation was immediately subject to polarisation, which was at times inspired by the political configuration of Belgium

[17]The traditional women's organisations were founded at the end of the nineteenth century, during and just after the first feminist wave in Belgium. In 1892, different organisations were founded with a juridical-feminist character. These organisations were pluralistic. At the beginning of the twentieth century, local Catholic women's leagues organised themselves, which gave rise to the KAV (Catholic labour women) and the KVLV (Catholic training for rustic women) in 1920, the Boerinnenbond (women farmers association) in 1911 and the SVV (Socialist far-sighted women) in 1922.

[18]Renée Van Mechelen, *Uit Eigen Beweging. Balans van de vrouwenbeweging in Vlaanderen 1970-1980* (Leuven: Kritak, 1979).

[19]The strike at FN Herstal and ACEC in Charleroi resulted in the Action Committee Equal Payment for Equal Work in 1966. This Action Committee decided to continue the struggle for economical equality between men and women after the strike (Brussels: RoSa).

[20]She had the department of the Family under her jurisdiction until 1968.

[21]Ria Christens, "Verkend verleden. Een kritisch overzicht van de vrouwengeschiedenis 19de-20ste eeuw in België," *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* 27, no. 1–2 (1997): 5–37.

[22]Rebecca Rogers, *From the Salon to the Schoolroom*, 3.

[23]Ria Christens, "Verkend verleden."

[24]Ruth Lister et.al., *Gendering Citizenship in Western Europe. New Challenges for Citizenship Research in a Cross-National Context* (Bristol: Policy Press, University of Bristol, 2007), 210.

in the 1950s and 1960s.[25] The three major ideological pillars in Belgium – Socialists, Catholics and Liberals – had different goals in relation to the issue of (women's) education, and thus different interpretations of the concept of emancipation, resulting in a politicisation of the debate.[26]

The messages conveyed in the women's episodes at this time must be understood within this continuously evolving and divided context, in which (political) actors were searching for power in defining women's responsibilities as citizens. The educational and normative implications of the women's episodes were clear: "It was a time in which we obviously pointed out how it should or should not be. Very patronising."[27] The goal towards which the process of becoming a responsible woman had to be directed was based on a normative idea of women's citizenship. A specific idea of *women's emancipation* was always the target. "Women had to become valuable and whole-hearted."[28] Nevertheless, it was not until 3 January 1964 that women's emancipation was explicitly dealt with, in an episode entitled "From home economics to state home economics" – which resulted in all sorts of discussions concerning the conceptualisation of this notion. This specific episode addressed women's responsibility vis-à-vis the state – and thus women's citizenship – very explicitly, seeking to redefine this responsibility in terms of "state home economics". Although emancipation was implicitly present in the intentions of the women's episodes from the point at which they began, the explicit use of this term provoked a considerable amount of discomfort in the viewers – especially regarding the ways in which women's emancipation was conceptualised.[29] What did emancipation historically represent, and to whom? Which groups were separated and what borders were established by means of (the debate regarding) the concept of women's emancipation? What were the most important reactions from the viewers, and what were their attitudes towards women's emancipation? What were the opinions of the TV presenters?

"From home economics to state home economics": Instigating emancipation?

On the evening of Friday 3 January 1964, women and men were confronted with images and debate regarding women's emancipation in a 45-minute long episode entitled "From home economics to state home economics". After the first part, in which "*the* history of *the* women's emancipation" was visualised as if it were a unilateral success story, this very same success story was completely counteracted

[25]Els Witte, *Political History of Belgium* (Brussels: Academic and Scientific Publishing, 2009); Els Witte, Jan De Groof, and Jeffrey Tyssens, *Het schoolpact van 1958. Ontstaan, grondlijnen en toepassing van een Belgisch compromis* (Brussels: VUBPRESS, 1999); Wilfried Dewachter, *Tussen staat en maatschappij 1945-1995: christen-democratie in België* (Tielt: Lannoo, 1995); Denise De Weerdt, *En de vrouwen? Vrouw, vrouwenbeweging en feminisme in België 1830-1960* (Gent: Masereelfonds, 1980).

[26]However, there was also no internal consensus on how to conceptualise women's education and emancipation. Els Witte, Jan De Groof, Jeffrey Tyssens, *Het schoolpact van 1958. Ontstaan, grondlijnen en toepassing van een Belgisch compromis* (Brussels: VUBPRESS, 1999).

[27]Interview with Paula Sémer, October 29 2010.

[28]Interview with Paula Sémer, October 29 2010.

[29]Importantly, from that year on, the name *Penelope* for the educational episodes for women was heavily criticised by Paula Sémer and the most of her crew. *Penelope* was replaced by *Quart-Eve* in 1966.

by the second part, in which difficulties in women's lives were discussed. In this section, three working women – Maria Rosseels,[30] Betty Frantzen[31] and Johanna De Schampheleire[32] – were interviewed by Paula Sémer. Rosseels ascribed the emancipation problem to the "mental education of the woman".

> Mentally, she is nowhere. The modern woman still did not turn her emancipation to account. […] One of the main causes is the woman's anxiety to really take responsibility, a responsibility different from what she has been accepting for thousands of years – the care for the family, the husband, the children. A responsibility as a citizen in a state, in a community, that seems to scare her off. Women do not have sufficient self-awareness. She seeks for power in her outer appearance and not in her intellectual capacities, which she obviously has.[33]

Thus, Rosseels subtly criticised the content of the majority of previous *Penelope* episodes. On the one hand, these encouraged women to take their family responsibilities into account, whilst on the other, they served women a well-defined ideal regarding female beauty. Pleading for the "mental awakening of women", Rosseels strived to breach "that traditional image of how women have to be […] For Heaven's sake… Is there nothing in a woman but an unwrinkled face or a specific figure?" Underlining the idea that women have "a responsibility as a citizen in a state", Rosseels linked women's individuality with the collective. Thus, with the emancipatory notion being conceptualised as taking up responsibility in a state, a specific *gendered citizenship* is formulated.[34] This illustrates how the concepts of emancipation and citizenship are indissolubly interdependent. Women's emancipation was closely connected to female citizenship, which, in turn, came down to women participating in public life. Subsequently, Sémer challenged the ideal of "the woman at the fireside": "For many women the burning fire isn't enough. They are tempted by the world of professional labour". Thereby, the connection between emancipation and taking up "a responsibility as a citizen in a state" on the one hand and professional labour on the other was quickly made – this, according to Frantzen, was an indispensable condition for women's emancipation.

> The right to labour is a very important right, since one cannot feel free unless one is completely enabled to provide for oneself. […] The work of a housewife – no matter how important – is never expressed in terms of money. Professional labour gives more independence to women.[35]

This resulting conceptualisation of *women's emancipation* in terms of professional labour was defended in the service of the Flemish nation's economical progress. In

[30]Maria Rosseels was a Flemish writer and journalist. From 1947 to 1977 she was responsible for the women's column in the Flemish newspaper *De Standaard*. As a resigned "nun" she wished to have done not only with gender inequality, but also with a particular Catholic tradition.

[31]Until 1966 Betty Frantzen was national secretary of the women's movement SVV (Socialist far-sighted women).

[32]Johanna De Schampheleire was licentiate in economics, teacher in economics and mother of six children. For this reason she was an excellent candidate for exemplifying women's emancipation.

[33]Rosseels, *From Home Economics to State Home Economics*, 3.1.1964.

[34]Lister et al, *Gendering citizenship in Western Europe*.

[35]Frantzen, *From Home Economics to State Home Economics*, 3.1.1964.

this scope, De Schampheleire was invited to a television debate, as she was regarded as an excellent example of an "emancipated woman". She successfully combined her duties as a part-time working teacher with her responsibilities caring for her husband and six children. As an "exemplary heroine" she could encourage other women to "turn their emancipation to account". Starting from the idea that women's double routine was one of the biggest barriers for emancipation, De Schampheleire was asked "whether this double routine, the task of a working wife and mother, is not too heavy?"

> No madam! It is just a matter of organisation. […] The family is an economically returning institution. So it is just a matter of organising housekeeping as one organises a business. That means with the less possible effort the highest possible return […] I think it is unfortunate that so many women are still spending time knitting in their homes. This cannot be considered work. It does not return.[36]

Emancipation was "undoubtedly nothing but a good cause", because "a normal family is a democratic family; this means that man and woman are equals; that they share the same responsibilities". Consequently, the introduction of the notion of women's emancipation did not only counter the traditional idea of womanhood, but also challenged opinions regarding the family and society. Being a responsible woman not only meant a dedication to the moral education of one's children; a woman also had to successfully combine this with professional labour outside the home, thus contributing to the family's and the nation's economy. Anticipating that more women would combine motherhood and a career, traditional achievements, such as knitting, were challenged.[37] Thus, the conceptualisation of women's emancipation had a twofold implication. First, as consumers, women had to "make use of the industry". Being a good consumer became part of the post-war definition of "good citizenship" advocated by the state. Second, paid labour outside the home became the dominant work activity. Unpaid activities as domestic chores fulfilled by women inside the home could no longer "be considered work", because they had no "economical" or "productive" value. Domestic chores became invisible as work and became mystified as "natural" services of women, as a "labour of love".[38] It was precisely this understanding of women's emancipation that was met with opposition. It was assumed that housewives did not "work". But how can the concept of "work" be interpreted? As such, the compelling character of what ought to be a liberating project becomes manifest. As a result of the emancipatory discourse, "being" (or, better, acting as) a woman did not become freer, but rather was subject to other norms.

Professional labour "outside the home": Leg up to emancipation?

From 41 selected viewers' letters and several newspaper cuttings from *De Standaard* (8.1.1964), *Vooruit* (8.1.1964) and *De Nieuwe Gids* (8.1.1964), we took diverse

[36]De Schampheleire, *From Home Economics to State Home Economics*, 3.1.1964.

[37]Although De Schampheleire was a teacher, the discussion regarding women teachers marrying and the marriage ban was not touched in this programme, nor was it dealt with in the other episodes or in the viewers' letters.

[38]Hannelore Vandebroek, "Gehuwd en werkloos? Opvattingen over vrouwenarbeid en vrouwenwerkloosheid in Belgische katholieke intellectuele kringen (1945-1960)," *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* 33, no. 1–2 (2003): 215–58.

fragments of text focusing on the conceptualisation of women's emancipation as raised in the episode. We searched for differing conceptualisations of emancipation, the specific writers' backgrounds and the ideological/political tension of the debate. This is why the letters were analysed following some self-constructed clusters. Womanhood was divided into the "woman working inside the home" and the "woman fulfilling professional labour outside the home". For both of these categories we investigated opinions towards their own tasks, workload and emancipation; attitudes towards the way in which the women working both inside and outside the home were represented in the episode; and "arguments" pro and contra the conceptualisation of women's emancipation as raised in the episode – theoretically approached with the help of the notions *domestic* and *progressive ideology*.[39] Finally, we noted the alleged results of working outside or inside the home for women themselves, their husbands, their children and the nation state.

Of 41 letters, eight appreciated the episode.[40] Both the working women and the housewives who wrote in mostly defended their own role: women sought to emphasise that they had achieved emancipation. This means that most women fulfilling professional labour appreciated the episode, whilst the women at the fireside resisted it. Thus the emancipatory discourse was not experienced as liberating, let alone considered as *the* path to integration.

In particular, the traditional Catholic Flemish women's organisations[41] expressed negative comments.[42] Their reactions seem tied up with intellectual attitudes towards female labour as discussed in Catholic-inspired academic magazines in post-war Belgium.[43] In these magazines, the notions of 'labour' and 'labourer' received an evident male interpretation. Female labour was seen as a modern illness, causing the disintegration of the family. In particular, the labour of mothers was highly problematic, since it was considered to harm the physical and moral health of her children. It is within this discourse that the discrimination in and exclusion of married women from the labour market was expressed, elaborated and legitimised. Of course, in the scope of women's emancipation, this analysis is highly problematic for those women who did not have to work, but actually wanted to. For them, this analysis closed the routes to possible alternatives and help.

In contrary to the traditional Catholic women's organisations, the SVV (Socialist far-sighted women) did not react to the episode, possibly because the national secretary of the SVV, Frantzen, had participated. The remaining reactions came from SPOO-Peeters Psychologists (one letter) and from individual women (29 selected letters) and men (four selected letters) with very divergent backgrounds. Clearly, the

[39]Rebecca Rogers, *From the Salon to the Schoolroom*.

[40]This reflects the proportions of positive and negative reactions in the archived letters.

[41]The most important were KAV (Catholic Labour Women), VKAJ (Female Catholic Labour Youth) and KWB (Federation of Catholic Workman). De Weerdt, *En de vrouwen?*.

[42]I analysed seven letters from Catholic women's organisations. These letters were all very critical with regard to the proclaimed ideals concerning women's emancipation and were in each case signed by numerous female members.

[43]Vandebroek analysed six distinct Catholic-inspired academic magazines and explored the attitudes of Catholic intellectuals towards women's labour. The magazines under investigation were: *De Gids op Maatschappelijk Gebied, De Christelijke Werkgever, Universitas, Bulletin de l'Institut de Recherches Economiques et Sociales, Revue Générale Belge* and *La Revue Nouvelle*. See Hannelore Vandebroek, "Gehuwd en werkloos.

debate was politically and ideologically loaded, resulting in a highly polarised and politicised debate.

Generally, the debate referred to the existence of two "voices" in the conceptualisation of women's emancipation. Both the alleged *domestic* and *progressive* ideologies[44] coincided and conflicted. Positive, so-called "progressive" reactions – written mainly by individual women fulfilling professional labour – emphasised that "the number of wives and women currently working outside their homes is so important that the problems of this category of women cannot be neglected"[45] and that "women know more than cooking, sewing or fashion".[46] Treating these "more profound issues"[47] was "this time really different from what they were used to: interesting, reliable and well-cared-for".[48] But the challenge to cooking and sewing was not broadly supported. After all, the administration of the Christian Women's Guild in Kapellen (Flanders) was "sure that by means of knitting and sewing and all kinds of other domestic activities one can keep her family together way better than that particular lady".[49] As a consequence, "the way in which Rosseels defended women's emancipation was unengaging and far from complete. An unmarried woman can hardly understand the grand task of being a wife and a mother".[50] And this was what it was all about for the writers: the grand task of being a wife and a mother. The VKAJ describe it concisely when they wonder "how they should interpret women's emancipation":

> Does it mean: to earn like a man, to fulfil an equal profession with equal payment, and to attain an equal certificate? – Or does it mean to have more respect and appreciation for the vocation of the housewives who are recognised as the heart of the family, who devote themselves to the education of their children to make them 'good'?[51]

The debate originated from concerns regarding children's (moral) education on the one hand and the building of the nation state on the other.[52] The family was considered the nation's cornerstone; the woman was the pivot of this family. Consequently, women's education was fundamentally concerned with the Flemish nation's formation. From this point of view the domestic work was undeservedly touched

[44]Rebecca Rogers, *From the Salon to the Schoolroom*.

[45]Viewer's letter anonymous woman, 7.1.1964.

[46]Viewer's letter De Cubber, 7.1.1964.

[47]Viewer's letter Devocht, 8.1.1964.

[48]Viewer's letter J. Magits, 11.1.1964.

[49]Viewer's letter Christian Women's Guild in Kapellen, 9.1.1964.

[50]Viewer's letter DC Tervuren, Dreymaeker-Ceuppens, 8.1.1964.

[51]Viewer's letter VKAJ, 6.1.1964

[52]For other studies in this domain, see also: Annemieke Van Drenth and Minneke Van Essen, "The Ambiguity of Professing Gender: Women Educationists and New Education in the Netherlands (1890–1940)," *Paedagogica Historica* 44, no. 4 (2008): 379–96; Minneke Van Essen, "'New' Girls and Traditional Womanhood. Girlhood and Education in the Netherlands in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century," *Paedagogica Historica* 29, no. 1 (2006): 125–49; J. Miller, "Nature, Education and the Natural Woman," *Paedagogica Historica* 14, no. 2 (2006): 385–403; B. Pyskir, "Mothers for a Fatherland: Ukrainian Statehood, Motherhood, and National Security," *Paedagogica Historica* 7, no. 1 (2007): 50–66, R. Howe and S. Swain, "Saving the Child and Punishing the Mother: Single Mothers and the State 1912–1942," *Paedagogica Historica* 17, no. 37 (2009): 31-46; Angela Davis, "'Oh no, nothing, we didn't learn anything': Sex Education and the Preparation of Girls for Motherhood, c.1930-1970," *History of Education* 37, no. 5 (2008): 661–77.

upon as if it were "insignificant or inferior work".[53] The writers could not reconcile themselves to the television's arguments in favour of the working women: "As a woman is rarely at home she runs short of her maternal duty and the family suffers".[54] Thus, housewives should be represented more positively. After all, they realised the importance of

> unity in the family. A housewife can be an "emancipated woman" too… […] It is the natural and Christian task of the woman to provide her husband and children with the help and the atmosphere, which is indispensable for their human and religious rising. This is not a matter of subordination; on the contrary, in this area the man is subordinate to the woman and dependent on her talent and devotion.[55]

For this reason, the episode's representation of women staying at home was criticised. A "mother at the fireside" wondered: "since when are we, mothers who raise their kids themselves, dopes?"[56] Housewives, wives and mothers were placed on a pedestal. These wives, who lived for their husbands and children, guaranteed a better society. On the other hand, women who did not carry out the duties given to them by nature were the cause of real danger.

> The sexual quality gives women the possibility to reproduce in a way that engages them more than it does for male individuals. […] Now we can resist this quality or we can see it as an opportunity for women's development. The first attitude is negative and is unprofitable, the second is positive. […] We want to protect the women of our time, who still have to learn how to use and understand their emancipation and freedom, for the dangers of such a negative attitude. The episode however has increased these dangers, because it is very unilateral and therefore misleading.[57]

"True emancipation" was situated in the development of the task of mother and governess of the children; this was a "joyful and satisfactory activity".[58] Therefore, the notion of "women working at home" had to bring the workload of women staying at home to the attention of the Flemish nation:

> The task of housewives is a fully fledged profession. In order to realise emancipation the revaluation of this profession is essential. Housewives have to be aware that they yield just like their husbands (persons at expense and without profession: how forged is this image!)[59]

Therefore, it was "dreadful that the episode solved the housewives' tasks by means of a dishwasher and the degradation of the handiwork of our mothers".[60] Consequently, the image of the working wives and mothers was countered, because: "What if one is blessed with a large family? […] In this emancipation-episode nothing has been said about the real education of the children. […] Rather bring us

[53]Viewer's letter administration KAV Uitkerke, 8.1.1964.
[54]Viewer's letter anonymous, 11.1.1964.
[55]Viewer's letter DC Tervuren, Dreymaeker-Ceuppens, 8.1.1964
[56]Viewer's letter L. De Bondt De vidts, 7.1.1964.
[57]Viewer's letter SPOO-Peeters Psychologists, 8.1.1964
[58]Viewer's letter Dekkers, member department Putte Christian Labour women guild, 9.1.1964.
[59]Viewer's letter SPOO-Peeters Psychologists, 8.1.1964
[60]Viewer's letter A. Vandevoorde, leader female youth movement, 9.1.1964.

something about healthy family politics?"[61] In particular, the notion of a working mother of a large family – exemplified in the person of De Schampheleire in the episode – was fundamentally criticised, since she "provides bad work outside the home and fulfils her domestic tasks only halfway".[62] Justification of working outside the home was easier for mothers of small families; yet these mothers did not fully subordinate themselves to their true duties, since large families were particularly praiseworthy in Catholic surroundings. Working wives and mothers were not only bad housewives; what's more, they were too demanding, they undeservedly felt superior to other women and to their husbands and children, and they only thought of themselves. But the most important danger undoubtedly concerned the children's (moral) education: "The children are the victims of a family in which the mother goes out working all day".[63] An 18-year-old male student alerted working mothers to the dangers he considered inherent in such a situation: "Personally I am pro women's emancipation, but I am contra the neglect of education. […] In our world everybody has to accomplish a task; this also applies to women. This task is, above all, the children's education".[64] If women were not fully determined to fulfil these tasks, they wrongfully took their entire family's time:

> Fool it is, to disavow the special vocations of men and women and to assert that things could be the other way round or totally equal for both […] The woman's task is at home. When her task at her job has ended she takes possession of her complete family's leisure time to tidy up the task she did not fulfil during the day. She robs him and the children from *their* time. And let me emphasise that it is *their* time, which is their *right*.[65]

As a consequence, the writers of the viewers' letters "absolutely have to acknowledge that she is not a mother. If she were a real mother, she would not go out working and would take care of her children and her husband".[66] In contrast to the episode's assumptions, it was suggested, these women were not at all emancipated; rather, they were acting like pubescent girls:

> Pubescents pretend to be adults. When women pretend to be men, just like pubescents, they prove their immaturity. […] It is a sign of maturity and dignity when one safely knows to accept and use one's own way of being and possibilities, both physical and psychological.[67]

Obviously, women's "own way of being and their own possibilities" were located in the family's private sphere: "besides their place also their duty is situated there".[68] The key of true emancipation was hidden inside the home: "A good housewife is carried on the hands of her husband and children. This is her highest satisfaction. According to me this is where the 'emancipation' of the mother at the

[61]Viewer's letter A. Vercammen, 8.1.1964.
[62]Viewer's letter K. Pinkhof, 22.1.1964.
[63]Viewer's letter administration Christian Labour women guild Kapellen-Putte, 9.1.1964.
[64]Viewer's letter John Mahieu, 9.1.1964.
[65]Viewer's letter Marc Vandecruys-Raeymaekers, 10.1.1964
[66]Viewer's letter anonymous, 8.1.1964.
[67]Viewer's letter SPOO-Peeters Psychologists, 8.1.1964
[68]Viewer's letter A. Vandevoorde, leader female youth movement, 9.1.1964.

fireside lies".[69] Nevertheless, this did not imply that emancipation was simply and solely realised through women's work at home. Surprisingly, working at home was simultaneously represented as a duty and a choice in order to "be emancipated".

> Emancipation is rather situated in the idea that women can freely choose their own life path; that they are not, morally, obliged to be mother and housewife; that no ways are closed to them […] that they are also free to stick to the profession of housewife. […] What it comes down to is that she can freely choose.[70]

Despite the assertion that this was a matter of "free choice", it was not at all justifiable to "do as men do". Such ambiguous messages reveal the multiple interpretations and meanings of emancipation and demonstrate that the – at first sight dichotomous – *domestic* and *progressive ideologies* coincided. *The* alleged domestic and progressive ideology did not really exist and had to be nuanced.

Opening or closure of "free choice"? The paradox of emancipatory citizenship

Increased access to all sorts of education – not least by means of television – enabled women to learn to think of their individual roles in broader terms than simply that of the housewife. By analysing women's episodes and the social debate resulting from these episodes, we have shown how a very specific kind of individuality, or even citizenship, for women was created: the emancipated woman who successfully combined work both in and outside the family, who was both a good mother and a successful employee *and* who had the possibility and the skills to choose. Emancipation was increasingly recognised as an important end and means: it was an answer to the alleged women's problem, but simultaneously "being emancipated" became the end *an sich*. Emancipation represented and promoted a specific way of being involved, enabling women not only to participate in the labour market, but also to acquire the skills necessary to make their own choice. This makes it clear that emancipation was "not an evident comportment of the subject, but rather a governed choice".[71] This idea of emancipatory education as emancipatory government, establishing a specific kind of individuality or subjectivity, closely resembles Judith Butler's notion of an "enabling constraint".[72] On the one hand, *emancipation* enabled women in all sorts of alleged "typically female" subjects; on the other, the very same notion was introduced in order to counter the long-established ideas of womanhood. In both cases the emancipatory concept introduced a norm with regard to the process of becoming a woman; a norm that was tied up with a specific interpretation of other concepts, such as work and citizenship. This complexity creates a considerable amount of fuzziness regarding the conceptualisations of all of these notions[73]. As such, the unilateral understanding of emancipation in terms of

[69]Viewer's letter L. Boecksestaens, 10.1.1964.

[70]Viewer's letter SPOO-Peeters Psychologists, 8.1.1964

[71]Kerlijn Quaghebeur, "Participation for Free. Exploring (Limits of) Participatory Government," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 38, no. 4 (2006): 508.

[72]Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

[73]The conceptual fuzz revealed in this paper also supports the idea of dealing with statistics regarding women's public participation as a narrative source, since these too are not merely collected, but produced, created and presented in a specific framework, with specific goals. Vandebroek and Van Molle, "The era of the housewife?"

liberation is countered. However, this does not imply a complete shift from a liberating to a patronising reading of emancipation. It rather invites us to understand emancipation – which is at first sight a liberating educational practice – in terms of its paradoxical effects.[74] The emancipatory discourse is simultaneously patronising and liberating.

Given the conceptualisation of emancipation in terms of taking up a responsibility as a citizen in a state, the very notion of citizenship is also simultaneously inclusive and exclusive. "Citizenship operates as a force for both inclusion and exclusion […] This refers to citizenship's simultaneously emancipatory and disciplinary quality."[75] Thus, paid work has represented an emancipatory path to citizenship for many women, providing them with more or less economic independence and access to social citizenship rights. Yet it can also be experienced as a disciplinary force for some of those who wish to provide full-time care.[76] Obviously, emancipatory citizenship can be realised in the private sphere. Consequently, citizenship and emancipation are *momentum concepts.*[77] Both cases are really about what we do, not where we do it. They are about acting like a citizen, not about being a citizen.

The tension between emancipation's inclusionary and exclusionary sides is inherent in the concept and has led to problematisation of the idea of inclusion which relentlessly produces exclusion. The introduction of the emancipatory concept in the episode "From home economics to state home economics" (1964) did not transcend segregation; on the contrary, it seems as if a twofold process of segregation occurred. On the one hand, the continuous existence of women's educational episodes implied that women's education was distinguished from men's; on the other, the category of womanhood itself was divided because of the establishment of borders between the alleged *emancipated* and *traditional* women.[78] However, the episodes simultaneously integrated women, since the debate regarding the emancipation concept invited them to participate in the discussions.

[74]Depaepe, "Dealing with Paradoxes of Educationalization."

[75]Ruth Lister et al, *Gendering citizenship in Western Europe*, 11.

[76]Care and the division of care responsibilities between women and men has emerged as a key issue in the theorisation and politics of gendered citizenship and women's emancipation. "Care is sometimes identified on the one hand as an obstacle to women's citizenship because of the gendered domestic division of labour and time and on the other as a resource for citizenship and an expression of citizenship responsibility" – this same paradox applies to emancipation. Ruth Lister, "Inclusive Citizenship: Realizing the Potential," *Citizenship Studies* 11, no. 1 (2007): 56.

[77]"Momentum concepts unfold, so that we must continuously rework them in a way that realizes more and more of their egalitarian potential. As such, they provide tools for marginalized groups struggling for social justice." Lister, "Inclusive Citizenship: Realizing the Potential": 49.

[78]Craig Campbell, Geoffrey Sherington and Margaret White, eds, "Borders and Boundaries in the History of Education," *Paedagogica Historica* 43, no. 1 (2006): 1–6.

As a result, emancipation is understood as a historical and performative discourse and its normativity is revealed.[79] Although women's emancipation is performative, and thus a "doing" by which women "can occupy, reverse or resignify its meaning", it is also an "identification, a norm that chooses us and thus, a norm we do not choose".[80] This norm can never be understood apart from the context in which we are inextricably located. The rather paradoxical notion of a "governed choice" takes notice of these simultaneous processes of subjectification and subjection. In every specific historical context, the possibilities for women are determined or conditioned along different social, cultural, economical and political lines. However, there is still the possibility to choose in accordance to particular emancipatory norms. Like Lister,[81] we want to plead for an *ethos of pluralisation*, which makes it possible to think of emancipation in a radically plural rather than a dual way. The theoretical challenge here has been to work with this ethos of pluralisation without sacrificing citizenship's universalist emancipatory promise as expressed in the ideals of inclusion, participation and freedom.

Notes on contributors

E. Flamez is a PhD student in the history of education in the Department of Foundations of Education at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences at Ghent University, Belgium. After studying the educational sciences at Ghent University, she started working at the Department of Foundations of Education as an assistant. Her research focuses on the history of girls' and women's education between 1954 and 1975 in Flanders, Belgium.

B. Vanobbergen is Guest Professor at the Department of Foundations of Education, Ghent University, Belgium. His research focuses on the history of childhood, with a particular interest in the processes of educationalisation, medicalisation and commodification of childhood.

[79]Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," in *Feminist Theory Reader. Local and global perspectives*, eds. Carole McCann and Seung-kyung Kim (Great Britain: Routledge, 2003).

[80]According to Judith Butler, "there is a cost in every identification, the loss of some other set of identifications, the forcible approximation of a norm one never chooses, a norm that chooses us, but which we occupy, reverse, resignify to the extent that the norm fails to determine us completely." Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 126–7. Also see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York/London: Routledge, 1990).

[81]Ruth Lister, "Inclusive Citizenship: Realizing the Potential": 49–61.