

Substantive and Descriptive Representation

Investigating the Impact of the Voting Right and of Descriptive Representation on the Substantive Representation of Women in the Belgian Lower House (1900-1979)

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“(…) devra-t-elle forcer elle-même les portes du parlement pour amener les députés égoïstes à ne pas garder pour eux seuls la plénitude des droits qui reviennent à chaque citoyen majeure?”¹

1. Introduction: descriptive and substantive dimensions of representation

One of the central points of interest in recent feminist political theory on representation concerns the relation between descriptive and substantive representation. To put it in short, it amounts to saying that gender has an influence on the potential to represent women (Phillips 1995, 1998, Mansbridge 1999, Young 1997, 2000, Williams 1998, Tamerius 1995). This stems from women's different life experience and their structural position in society. Tamerius states that this life experience comprises both concrete life experience and its gendered perception on the one hand and the access to information about female life experience via contacts and socialisation on the other (Tamerius 1995). Given that women MP's (*descriptive representatives*) share their experience at least punctually with female citizens, their presence – according to these writers – means a higher chance for the representation of women, their needs and interests, for presenting of a female perspective, or for the voice of women to be heard (*substantive representation*).

Especially when representatives act as a *trustee*, where they leave the boundaries of party programmes and rely on their own insights and views, or concerning women's subjects that are *uncrystallised*, the female experience could, according to these theoreticians, play a role in the representation of women. Life experience provides the necessary 'resources', namely conscience and expertise, to define and describe women's interests. It can also lead to higher priority given to subjects of specific importance to women. As a result, women MP's could be women's most fervent representatives (Phillips 1998, Tamerius 1995).

2. Hypotheses, research outline and situation in the research tradition

These insights bring us to the following hypothesis concerning the potential contribution of women MP's to representing women: Given the specific life experience and social position of women and the potential sensitivity, knowledge, expertise and willingness that they generate for the representation of women, we suppose that the (growing) presence of women MP's results in:

- 1) a quantitative increase in substantive representation of women and
- 2) a qualitative improvement in substantive representation of women.

Besides this, it is to be expected that the presence of a female electorate generates a similar influence. From the moment there is a female electorate, the mechanism, of different political parties trying to more often and better represent female citizens to make them vote for them, starts working. From then on, of course, they also depend on them for their re-election.

These hypotheses are tested via an analysis of the substantive representation of women (or the attention women's interests got) during the most central political debates in Belgian Parliament: the budget debates in the Belgian 'Kamer van de Volksvertegenwoordigers' (Lower House of Parliament). Budget debates are politically important discussions, that take place every year and that are known for a high degree of accessibility. Every MP can apply for them and the diversity of subjects that can be treated is high (Bruyneel 1965, Matthijs 1991, Van de Voorde, 1972). Furthermore, the status and function of budget debates are

¹¹ Quote by Catholic MP Standaert in a homogeneous and male parliament voted by a homogeneous male electorate (Kamer, Parlementaire Handelingen, 1919-1920, 1253).

rather stable so that we get homogeneous research material that can be compared through time.

We based our operationalisation of ‘substantive representation of women’ on Pitkin’s definition “acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them” (Pitkin 1972: 209). For our research we operationalized this definition as follows: *acting for women is to denounce a situation that is disadvantageous for women, to formulate a proposal to improve the situation of women or to claim a right for women with the same goal*. We mapped these interventions between 1900-1979². As a result, our research could be divided into 3 phases:

- 1900-1929: a homogeneous male parliament
- 1930-1948: some women MP’s,³ but no female electorate
- 1949-1979: women MP’s *and* a female electorate

We mapped these interventions in favour of women both quantitatively and qualitatively and then analysed the impact of the presence of women MP’s (and a female electorate) on the substantive representation of women.

This research situates us in a decades-long, mainly Anglo-American, empirical research tradition about ‘representation of women by women’. Under the header ‘representation of women’ largely two aspects are investigated, namely attitudes and parliamentary activities. The most frequently analysed attitudes concern: recognition of existence of women’s interests (a.o. Skjeie 1998); sensitivity for a responsibility to devote attention to them (a.o. Whip 1991); to lend priority to them (a.o. Thomas en Welch 2001); the degree of congruence between the points of view of women MP’s on the one hand and the female citizens (a.o. Diaz 2002) and women’s liberation movement (a.o. Reingold 2000) on the other. Empirical research on substantive representation of women within a parliamentary context mainly focuses on legislative activity: initiating, accompanying and voting of legislation in favour of women (a.o. Reingold 2000, Swers 2002, Wolbrecht 2002). Besides this the participation in parliamentary debates in favour of women also sparks interest (a.o. Cramer Walsh 2002, Trimble 2000). Our research is to be situated in this last research schedule.

This research though differs in a methodological way from those investigations. The empirical research tradition is problematic because it doesn’t find a connection with the previously exposed theory on a crucial point. According to the theoreticians we mentioned ‘that what has to be represented’ (women’s interests) results from the diversified life experience of different groups of women. Women’s interests then, are *a priori* undefined, context related and subject to evolution.⁴ The major part of empirical studies does not respect this *a priori* undefineability of women’s interests. Often a thematical selection is made beforehand, of those women interests that are taken into account for measuring attitudes or action of male and female

² The choice of an end date for this research (1979) was made choosing the budget debates. From 1980 on these budget debates no longer took place in the plenary national parliament (Matthijs 2002: 336). For reasons of homogeneity and comparability of research material we decided to take the 1978-1979 term as an end date. As a start date we opted for 1900 to assure sufficient variety in context factors.

³ The socialist fraction was the first to have, from 1929 on, a woman MP. In 1936 the Communist fraction had its first woman MP as well. The catholic fraction followed in 1946 with its first woman MP. Only in 1965 would the liberal fraction have its woman MP. The Flemish nationalist fraction welcomed its first woman MP in 1971; the French-speaking nationalist fraction in 1974. See also attachments 1 and 2 for the names of representatives and evolution in their number.

⁴ In the eighties, on the contrary, a number of theoreticians did speak out about the contents of women’s interests. Saphiro and Diamond and Hartssock stated that these resulted respectively from private and public work partitioning (Sapiro 1981, Diamond en Hartssock 1981).

representatives.⁵ A thematical demarcation of what are supposed to be women's interests is a hard to justify, subjective intervention of the researcher that furthermore threatens to essentialize women and their interests. Via our formal demarcation of women's interests we avoided this trap by also taking into account the contents of women's interests in our research. The 'history' of the promotion of women's interests that we created this way, proved a good base for questioning the relation between the presence of women MP's and the representation of women. It offered the possibility to go further into our (quantitative and qualitative) research questions. What are our observations?

3. Results

3.1. (More) descriptive representation = More substantive representation?

Figure 1 Number of interventions in favour of women and the average number of women MP's

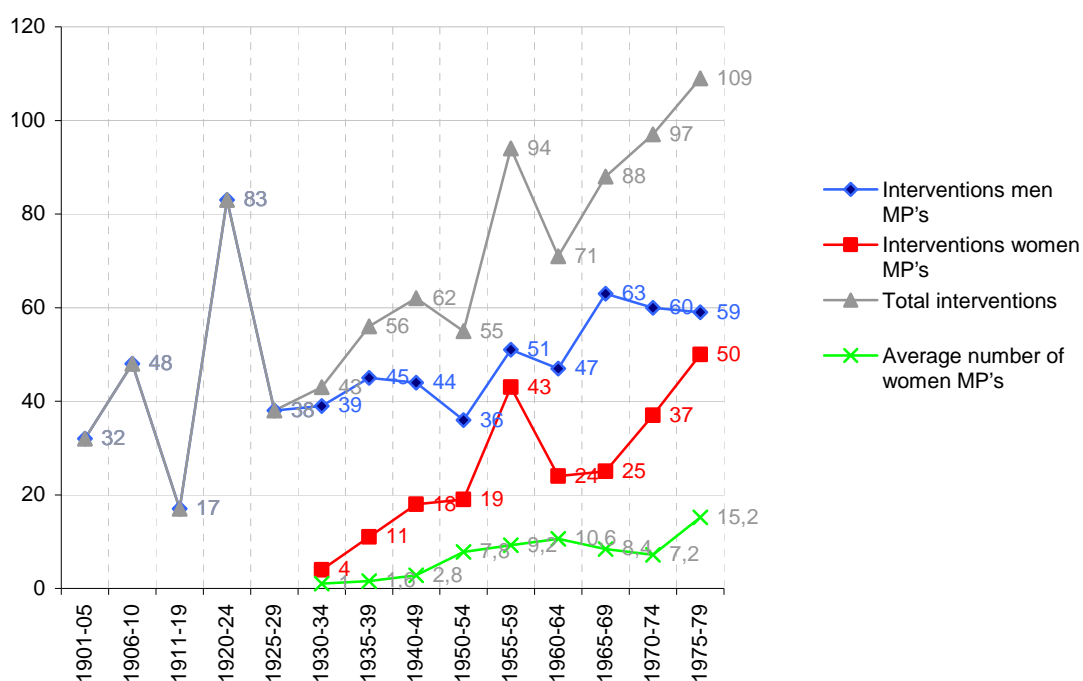


Figure 1 shows that the number of interventions in favour of women, throughout the researched period, was very unstable, but globally followed an upwards trend. Neither the entry of women MP's during the 1929-1930 term, nor the granting of the right to vote for women in 1948 provoked a marked break in the number of times that MP's defended women's interests during budget debates. The rise in the number of interventions in favour of women during the five decades after the advent of women MP's can be mainly attributed to the activity of women MP's. From the second half of the sixties on the number of interventions coming from women MP's increased substantially, parallel to the decrease of interventions coming from their male colleagues.

⁵ The thematical selection often contains both subjects concerning traditional women's roles in society as subjects with a clear feminist content. Research that uses this double definition of women's interests include a.o.: Carroll 1984, Childs 2001, Cramer Walsh 2002, Erickson 1997, Grey 2002, O'Regan 2000, Reingold 2000, Saint-Germain 1989, Tremblay 1993, Trimble 2000, Wängnerud 2000, Wolbrecht 2002.

The number of times that women's interest were treated has not always been proportionate to the number of women MP's. From 1940 to 1954, the number of interventions decreased, despite a large doubling of the number of women MP's. From 1960 to 1974 the number of interventions increased, despite a decrease in the number of residing women MP's. A similar independent evolution of the number of interventions in favour of women compared with the number of women MP's was found with both women as men MP's.⁶ That the number of interventions by male representatives in the period just before and just after the entry of women MP's has remained stable as well, supports the theory that men MP's did not feel more strongly motivated to represent women because of a stronger presence and activity of women MP's. In contrast with the findings of a number of studies (a.o. Cramer Walsh 2002, Levy, Tien en Aved 2002), the evolution of the number of women MP's did not have an indirect influence on the parliamentary activity in favour of women on a quantitative level via the men MP's.

Men MP's were the most active in representing women, even after the introduction of women MP's. In the 1930-1979 period, men MP's accounted for 65,8 % of interventions in favour of women. In the separate five year periods as well, men MP's almost always represented women more than then women MP's. Women MP's, on the other hand, were being 'overactive' in taking women's interests to heart. The women MP's that occupied an average of 3,3 % of the seats in the Lower House during the 1930-1979 period, accounted for more than a third (34,2 %) of interventions in favour of women. In contrast to the findings of a number of foreign studies, a possible fear of being stigmatized and punished when treating women's subjects in a parliament with a low number of women MP's (a.o. Thomas and Welch 1991, Flammang 1985, Duerst-Lahti 2002, Norris 1996), did not seem to demotivate the female members of the Belgian Lower House.

3.2. (More) descriptive representation = Better substantive representation?

How can we measure the quality of substantive representation? We can state that a good substantive representation is marked by a high congruency between the parliamentary protection of women's interests on the one hand and the way women themselves perceive their needs, wishes and interests on the other. To retrieve this last information is – it goes without saying – a '*mission impossible*'. A thematical description of subjects that we could measure this congruency by, is excluded as well though, for reasons previously explained. That brings us to the thesis that the quality of substantive representation can be best measured according to the extent to which it succeeds in bringing the theoretically boundless entity of women's interests to the parliament. The degree of substantive representation can be (at least partially) measured by its diversity or 'range'.

A second way of examining the quality of substantive representation of women is to check it with the programme of the women's movement. In spite of the fact that not all women support the claims of the women's movement (Sawer 2000) and, as a consequence, the feminist interests can not simply be equated with women's interests, it forms a relevant indication of the extent to which parliamentary representation of women connects with the way 'women themselves' define their interests and needs. Here as well, we take diversity among women and women's organisations into account. This way, the diversity in points of view and visions that exist within the (European) feminist movement (Offen 2000), is acknowledged in our research.

⁶ The number of interventions by men MP's often evolved independently from the number of men MP's as well.

In the paragraphs below we try to answer the question if the presence of women MP's and of a female electorate contributed to diversifying substantive representation of women. This question will be examined on two levels: 1) represented groups of women and issues treated 2) what was considered to be 'in favour of women' (the purpose of representing women). In this way we test the second part of our hypothesis, to know if a higher degree of descriptive representation leads to a 'better' substantive representation of women.

3.2.1. Represented women and their interests

Figure 2 Represented women (1930-1979)

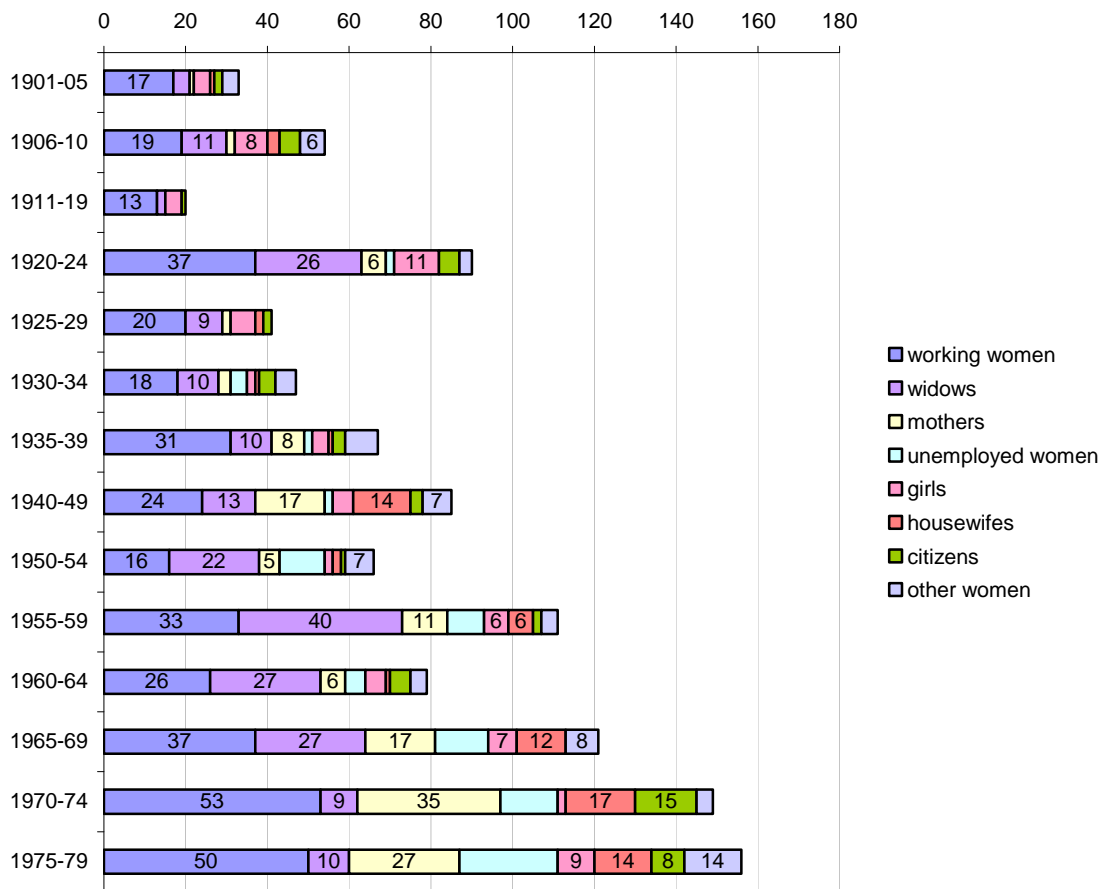
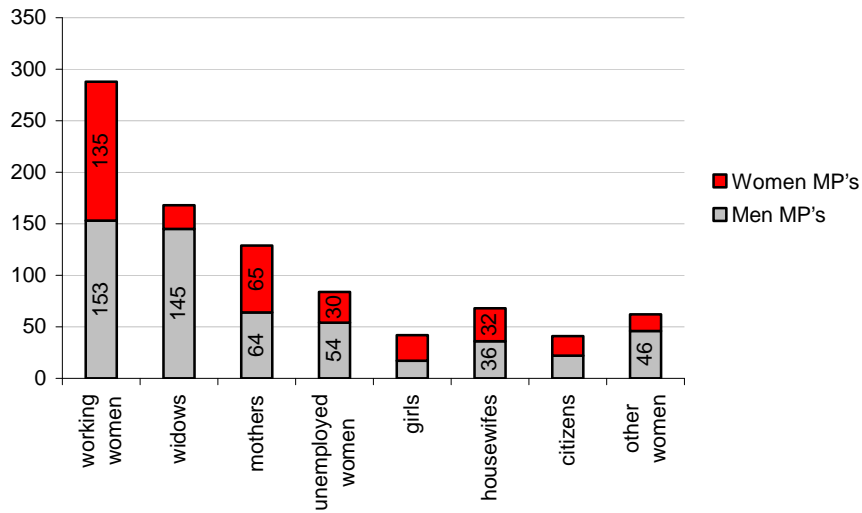


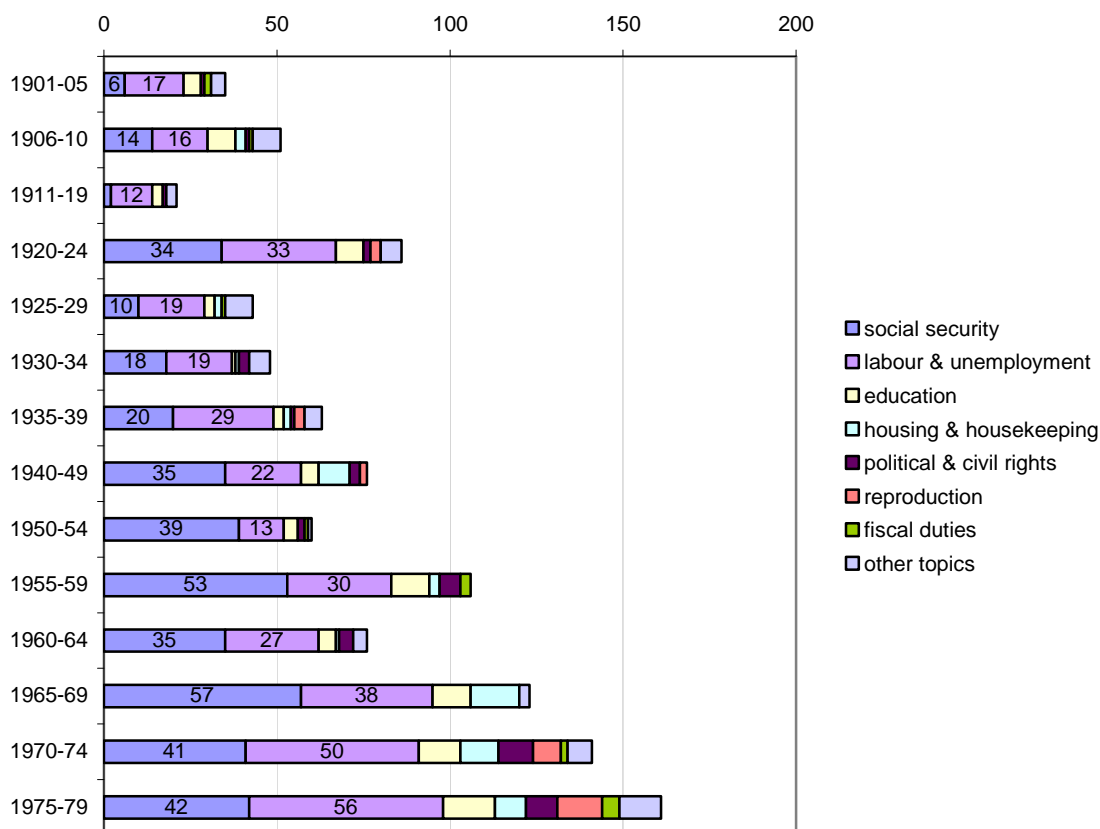
Figure 2 shows that the attention for the situation and rights of women during budget debates was very diversified and was related to different groups in society. The two categories that, in the researched period, attracted most often and permanently the attention of MP's, were women working outside of the house and widows. The figure shows that the entry of women in the Lower House in 1929 did not provoke a drastic change in the substantive representation of women in so far as representation of different groups of women was concerned. Rather than suggesting a break, these figures show a high degree of continuity. The presence of a female electorate (1948) did not provoke a fundamental change either in the interpretation of the content of substantive representation of women. The evolutions that we see in that area in the first half of the fifties compared to the second half of the fourties, have also been happening on other occasions.

Figure 3 Represented women by women and men MP's



Moreover, figure 3 shows that women MP's did not give a fundamentally different interpretation to the substantive representation of women concerning the representation of different groups of women. It is striking though, to see that women MP's, despite their small number, have contributed highly to the representation of these groups of women. In the case of the representation of working women, (future) mothers, housewives and the female citizen, their contribution was almost equal in absolute terms for the period 1930-1979. Girls are even more represented by women MP's, than by men MP's. To realize this high degree of representation of different groups of women in a smaller number of interventions, women MP's have brought up an average of 1,5 groups of women per intervention; men MP's brought up an average of 1,2 during the same period.

Figure 4 Represented women's interests



The social security and work themes were a constant in the interventions of MP's in favour of women. Concerning the themes treated there was, just as with the representation of a certain group of women, no clear break to be found, that coincided with the entry of women MP's from the thirties on or with the presence of a female electorate from the beginning of the fifties. Each theme showed a specific evolution wherein these dates did not provoke any caesurae. Secondly, figure 5, where figures on the treated themes are split up according to the sex of representatives, illustrates that women MP's did not have a fundamentally different agenda.

Figure 5 Represented women's interests by women and men MP's

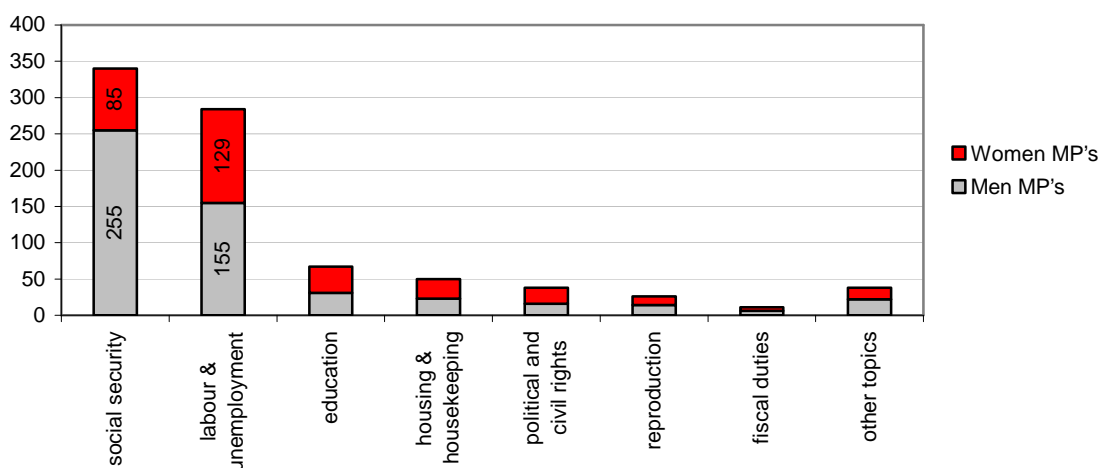


Figure 5 also shows that women MP's, despite their smaller number, did contribute greatly however to the management of the different themes. Men MP's only proved more active treating the social security interests for women. The big contribution of the limited number of women MP's to the substantive representation of different groups of women, was realized via the discussion of different women's interests during one and the same intervention. In average, women MP's treated 1,4 themes during one intervention, men MP's only discussed 1,2 themes (in the 1930-1979 period).

Next to this overall conclusion based on large categories, that women MP's did not fill in the representation of women in a fundamentally different way, we did however observe that they contributed in a unique way to it. Women MP's were the only ones to represent certain groups of women and specific themes (examples will be given in the next part of the paper). This widening of the political agenda had a relatively small quantitative importance, but did for sure realize a 'better' (because more diversified) substantive representation of the female citizen. Women MP's did not strikingly represent other groups of women or did not put forth fundamentally different women's themes, but did make new 'combinations', to know which claims regarding which groups of women were formulated. The interventions of women MP's were thus often situated outside of the dominant interpretation of the protection of women's interests. We will go further into this in the next part.

3.2.2. In the interest of women

Throughout the different claims and aims of MP's to improve the situation of the female citizen, different views became apparent of what was 'in favour of women'. Desirability and nature of paid work done by women in the light of their task and role as mothers and wives *and vice versa* form the contours of a debate that we found throughout the researched period, be it with a different interpretation. On the one hand we discerned a series of interventions where women were considered as individuals with the right to be treated equally compared to men. On the other hand, a part of the interventions can be categorized on the basis of the observation that they considered women firstly within their relational situation as mother and wife, whereby this role should be appreciated and/or secondly, as people with a female-specific role and task in society (the 'difference argument'). Table 1 gives us an overview of most heard claims that were part of the 'equality argument' on the one side and the 'difference argument' on the other.

These two positions coincided for the major part, but not completely, with the political fractions. The leftist fraction (socialists and communists) were the biggest advocates of the aim for individuality and equality in the framework of representing women. Catholics and nationalist parties were the most ardent defenders of the aim to appreciate the specific role of women in family and society. The Liberal Party was strikingly marginally present in the pursuit of improving the situation of the female citizen.

Table 1: Central claims of the ‘equality’ and ‘difference’ argument

Equality argument	Difference argument
Work	
equal pay for equal work; equal chances and treatment on the job market; combination of work and family tasks; no specific treatment for women on the job market	to limit, abolish and supervise unwomanly work that is harmful for health and morality of women and their families; higher salaries that are equal to men’s, better job opportunities and possibilities to combine work and family for feminine jobs; part-time work for women
Social security	
equal treatment of man and woman; non-discrimintory treatment of women working out of the house as compared to the housewife; individualisation of social security rights	derived women’s rights (e.g. widow’s pensions); family policy aimed at appreciation and support of the housewife; personal rights for feminine jobs
Education	
equal educational chances; tuning of education to participation in job market; breaking through stereotyped roles	domestic and family-related training of girls and education for typically feminine jobs
Political and civic rights, participation to socio-economic decision making	
aimed at the individual and equal rights of woman	aimed at consolidation and appreciation of the position of mothers and wives in society and in their families
in the private sphere	
housing and housekeeping adapted to the needs of women working out of the house; equal and juster distribution of domestic and caring tasks; reproductive rights (anticonception and abortion)	improving the situation of mothers concerning childbirth, housekeeping and housing
Fiscality	
getting rid of fiscal measures that are unfavourable to women (e.g. joining the income of husband and wife for tax purposes)	getting rid of fiscal disadvantage of part-time working women and career interrupters

3.2.2.1. The impact of the first descriptive representatives on the substantive representation of women (1900-1929, 1930-1948)

In the first half of the twentieth century, the major part of interventions in favour of women strived for the realization of a relational and woman-specific ideal. It is within this context that the contribution to the representation of women by the first women MP's has to be situated. We will illustrate this with the help of the claims for improvement of the situation of working women, that throw a light on what work MP's considered to be 'suitable for women' versus 'not suitable for women'.

Factory work was deemed negative and had to be heavily supervised, limited and sometimes even prohibited. The major part of MP's did not consider this work as something that had to be continued or stimulated, e.g. via higher wages or more comprehensive job opportunities. Factory work had to be curtailed in the first place because it was harmful for the moral and physical health of women and that of their offspring. The ideal of the housewife resounded clearly in these interventions. Because woman factory workers neglected housekeeping, husband and children, they deemed factory work unadvisable for women. Besides this relational aspect, factory work for women was rejected because it did not respect the line between male and female spheres. Factory work was heavy and dirty work, therefore not feminine. What is more, factories belonged in the public sphere and escaped patriarchal supervision.

Diametrically opposed to this mainly negative argument, was an argument concerning women teachers, nurses, midwives, servants, civil servants, washing and cleaning ladies, employees and farmers. Their work situation was not represented in an equally negative way and if it was, there was a very precise pleading to put things right. The work of these groups of working women did not have to be curtailed, but, on the contrary, had to be improved, protected, extended *and* better paid. This sort of labour (educating, caring, washing, cleaning and serving) was not considered to be at odds with the ideal, bourgeois image of woman. Furthermore, these were labour markets where women were not rivals to male workers.

MP's were reacting against the thirties legislation⁷ that struck women teachers and civil servants; the equal treatment of women teachers was regularly pleaded for in that framework. Next to that, a number of MP's pleaded for the maintaining of the function the moment the woman teacher got married or for measures facilitating the combination with family tasks. Where a conflict between women's payed labour and the role of women as mothers and wives resulted in pleas for a limit to women's employment in factories, in the case of these feminine jobs it could on the contrary lead to pleas for a better combination of work and family tasks.

The ideal of the housewife did not appear to be absolute. According to the MP's, a certain type of female activity had to be limited, and another type promoted. The double strategy of rejecting factory labour on the one side and the positive treatment of female work, for example as a teacher, on the other, can be situated in a relational and woman-specific ideal. Women's labour that stayed within the limits of 'the womanly' and did not interfere with her most important function, namely that of mother and housewife, was not rejected, on the contrary. MP's took certain steps to prohibit or to limit unwanted women's labour and to stimulate other forms of women's work.

⁷ The international economic crisis in the thirties prompted the Belgian government to adopt compelling and indirect measures to exclude women from the job market (Lambrechts 1979).

After the 1929 elections Lucie Dejardin entered the socialist fraction. She didn't get re-elected in 1936. Isabelle Blume-Grégoire would take her place in the socialist Lower House fraction. Alice Degeer-Adère entered the communist fraction at the same time. Comparing the attention for women's interests by these women MP's with the dominant interpretation we described earlier, we have to conclude that the women MP's brought on a new vision. Against the dominant interpretation of attention for women's interests striving for a relational and bourgeois ideal, women MP's put pleas that considered women to be individuals with equal economic and civic rights. As we will show, they treated the factory workers on the same level as other working women, did not reject factory work for women and put the woman working outside of the house on the same level with the housewife.

In the beginning of the thirties, Lucie Dejardin for example called upon the government to put an end to a series of problems that hit different groups of working women. In this intervention she treated factory workers in the same way as women employees. Isabelle Blume-Grégoire as well discussed these different groups of women together in pleas for equal minimum wages and for the application of the principle of equal wages for equal work. She strived for an equal treatment of women on the job market and the acknowledgement of women as full working forces. She pleaded against considering women as a labour reserve and for a better preparation of girls for their labour in the industry.

In 1935 Lucie Dejardin devoted a very elaborate intervention to the measures that were taken concerning the reduction of women's labour. As the only member of parliament, she disapproved of a quota restriction on women in the industry⁸ and went against the pleas rejecting factory labour of a certain number of her colleagues. This way, Blume-Grégoire and Dejardin thwarted the bourgeois division between desirable and undesirable labour for women.

Together with Blume-Grégoire, Alice Degeer-Adère defended the free choice of women between a life as a family mother or as a full labour force. This proposition leaves behind the prevailing concept of the ideal role for women in society. Firstly, they didn't hold the role of women as mothers and wives in higher esteem than her economical function, they were put on the same level. Secondly, these MP's did not make a difference between desirable and undesirable labour for women.

Women MP's contributed strongly to the substantive representation of women by broadening the definition of what was in favour of women. Against the dominant interpretation of the attention for women's interests that adapted itself to a relational and bourgeois ideal, women MP's put pleas that also considered women as individuals with equal economic and civic rights. This diversification can be considered as an improvement of the representation of women. This conclusion is strengthened by the fact that in this way, they formulated an important claim of the women's movement, that up to that moment had failed to be heard in parliament, to know the unconditional equality of men and women on an economical level.

Despite this, the attention for women's work interests by MP's generally remained rather fragmented in the first half of the twentieth century, in comparison to the series of claims of the women's liberation movement (Gubin 1999, De Weerd 1980, Boël en Duchène 1955).

The unacceptable conditions of women working in factories and traditional industries were also strongly rejected by the women's movement and they thought that measures had to be taken to put an end to bad practices as well. However, the right to work and to full economic equality in all sectors of the job market was much more strongly pleaded for in this period by the women's movement than by the MP's. Because of the interventions of women MP's, attention in the thirties for women's labour interests better reflected the diversity of points of

⁸ This was one of the economic crisis measures adopted in the thirties.

view that lived among the women's movement – and consequently among female citizens. Thus we can state that they realized a better representation of women.

3.2.2.2. The impact of a female electorate and of descriptive representatives on the substantive representation of women (1945-1979)

“Maintenant, je vais me permettre de vous donner gentiment un avertissement politique. Ces femmes ont également le droit de vote.”⁹

In comparison to the first half of the twentieth century, the representation of women with regard to the ideal pursued was less monolithic in the researched period after World War II. A big part of the interventions of MP's was still related to the mother role or to the position of women as wives. Next to that, during the second half of the thirties, the pursuit of equality of women compared to men had increased in such a way, that it could be viewed as a coherent series of claims, that formed a second, equal argument. Equality claims were mainly related to the acknowledgement of the right of women to work. From the end of the sixties on this pursuit of equality also became extended towards the private sphere. Next to equality on the job market, housekeeping tasks had to be split justly between husband and wife as well. Furthermore, a number of MP's equally considered women as 'individuals', also concerning women's reproductive interests, as opposed to a person 'in function of' motherhood or family. An important shift in the difference argument was that, in a number of cases, it was formulated as another vision on 'emancipation', that aimed at equivalence instead of equality. Slightly simplifyingly, we can put that the political left used an egalitarian, individual and job market oriented definition of the term, whilst the center right defined the term emancipation as differentiating and family-oriented.

How come a more diversified representation of women, namely the 'equivalent' co-existence of two visions on the role of women in society presented, itself from World War II on ?

The reasons for the existence of a relational and woman-specific ideal were equivalent in the period before and after the war. Family values and the ideals of women staying at home and men earning an income were still pursued by the politically dominant catholic party and by catholic and other groups of citizens. Furthermore, a natality policy was still being pursued and the ideal of the woman staying at home – and a more specific participation of women on the job market (e.g. via part-time labour) – was also deemed desirable for economical motives. The pursuit of equality also had an economical foundation and fitted into the plan of making the job market more attractive for women when there was a shortage of working power (Lambrechts 1979). After World War II, this trend was increasingly supported by the international community, that implemented the equal treatment of women on the job market, in social security and in education into treaties. From the second half of the sixties on, the women's movement equally played an important role in supporting the pursuit of equality.

Next to that, the changed political status of Belgian women was possibly a reason for this diversification. In 1948 women were granted the right to vote for legislative elections. The different political parties tried, in their way, to represent the interests of their female base by convincing them of the importance of their party for women. As shown by the quote in the

⁹ Quote by socialist MP Fontaine-Borguet (Kamer, Parlementaire Handelingen 1952-1953, 20.1.1953, 6).

beginning of this part, at least some MP's were indeed aware of the presence of women voters.

Another strategy to appeal to the female electorate, could have been the delegation of more women to parliament. Women MP's were indeed expected to represent the female citizen (Van Molle en Gubin 1998: 44). The increased diversity could therefore be a result of the presence of more women (with their specific qualities and interests) in different political fractions. Women MP's who were representatives of their party in the first place, just like their male colleagues, represented women within the framework of the ideology of their party. They were supported by the women's actions of the parties, who also aimed at including their points of view into the party programme. Women's sections of parties functioned as a source of support and expertise and in this way made a more diversified representation of women's interests possible.

In the following sections, we'll go further into the way that women MP's¹⁰ broadened the definition of 'what was in favour of women' after World War II. Our attention is drawn to the two themes that were central in the attention MP's devoted to women's interests: social security and work. We will only review the two parliamentary fractions that were the most active ones in representing women, namely socialists and catholics.

3.2.2.2.1. The socialist fraction

The socialist fraction very much strived for the realization of equality of men and women in the different political sectors. Men *and* women MP's together pursued equality of men and women on the job market and acted together for the improvement of the situation of working women. The socialist women greatly contributed to the attention of women's interests that pursued equality. In the second half of the forties and in the fifties, the women MP's, more so than their male colleagues, emphasized the different aspects of labour problems of women as a coherent entity. The unequal economical treatment of women, expressed in unequal (minimum) wages, the treatment of women as a labour reserve and the high unemployment of women, was, according to women MP's, a result of the inadequate education of women and girls and of the fact that they were still directed towards the housekeeping and family-oriented options in education. Concerning the combination of family and labour tasks, female MP's formulated lots of new political solutions in favour of working women, sometimes very specific ones (e.g. adapting business hours of shops to working hours of women). The absence of women in the economical decision-making organs (a subject that up to the fifties was only treated by women MP's) and the discrimination of working women in social security, were equally perceived by them as parts of that problem. Their male colleagues treated the major part of these subjects as well, but more often as separate problems, without pointing at their coherence.

In the following decades, men and women MP's grew towards each other regarding their analysis of the causes and remedies for the economical discrimination of women. One exception to this is the theme of the prejudices as cause of unequal wages and high unemployment for women. This was only approached by socialist women MP's – together with women MP's of other fractions.

The attention for women's interests in social security by the socialist fraction was also a part of the pursuit of equality between men and women. Women MP's extended this pursuit of equality concerning social security on a certain number of points. For example, they

¹⁰ See attachments 1 and 2 for an overview of women MP's per fraction.

demanding that a woman should generally be viewed as a potential head of the family. Next to that, women MP's also contributed in a unique way to the point of view of the socialist fraction by their refusal of a specific and relational vision on the role of women. They were the only ones to be opposed to the discrimination of women working outside of the house, created by the bonus for mothers staying at home and the social-pedagogical allowance.

Men and women MP's equally treated labour interests situated in the relational and woman-specific argument, e.g. part-time labour on the one side and higher wages and better career opportunities for typically female jobs on the other. Concerning part-time labour, men and women MP's had different opinions. Whereas the first ones supported part-time labour, women MP's were very critical about this form of job market participation of women. They feared it would jeopardize the equal treatment of women on the job market.

Concerning social security, men and women members of the socialist fraction, did go with the difference argument in a certain way as well. Here again, woman socialists contributed in a unique way. For example, they aimed at getting the period of career break to be taken into account when calculating retirement benefits of women and they pleaded for a better family-oriented education for girls.

3.2.2.2.2. The catholic fraction

The catholic fraction paid mainly – but not only – attention to women's interests that privileged a specific role for women as mothers and wives. The most outspoken claim regarding this 'difference appraisal' concerned the bonus for housewives and the social-pedagogical allowance, coupled with family help and an equal status of housewives in social security. This was pleaded by both men as women catholics. Female MP's contributed in a unique way to the difference argument. A women member of the fraction for example, was the only one to propose that mothers should be able to appeal to unemployment support after a career break taking care of her children.

The catholic men and women were equally the most active supporters of higher wages for typically feminine jobs and of a specific system of part-time labour for women. The women MP's contributed greatly on this subject. Firstly they were very critical on the effect that part-time labour could have on women regarding their economical position. Secondly, they emphasized that a redistribution of paid labour via part-time labour, should be accompanied with a redistribution of family work. Measures that were taken concerning a better combination of work and family tasks, should also benefit to men. Thanks to this critical position concerning part-time work and the extension of the equality idea to the private sphere, these catholic women broadened the vision of their fraction of what was in favour of women. This way, they realized an important extension of the representation of women by the catholic fraction.

Next to this, catholic women were the biggest advocates within their fraction, of the pursuit of equality concerning social security, more precisely concerning unemployment support, child allowances, sickness insurance for servants of working women and retirement benefits. Only the women MP's were supporters of the individualisation of social security rights. Moreover, they pleaded that women could be considered head of family, in equal measure as men by social security, so that they could equally build up rights concerning outliving benefits, family pension and sickness and invalidity benefits. Next to their contribution to the appraisal of the specific role of women in the family, catholic women MP's greatly improved the viewpoint of their fraction concerning equal rights of women in social security.

Just as the socialists, the catholic fraction – both male as female members – strived for equal wages for equal work and denounced the high unemployment rate among women. The battle for equality of women on the job market equally led the women MP's to adopt a unique point of view. Especially women MP's defended the right of women to work and the principle of equal wages for equal work. Some formulated very radical proposals, such as the introduction of quota for labour participation of women. The change of mentality needed, to enable girls to get a better technical education, was only debated in the fraction by women MP's. Women MP's participated in and opened up the normative debate about the role of women in society, both on the level of the fraction as on the level of the Lower House. Extending the equality idea into the private sphere, attention for the role of prejudices in discrimination of women on the job market and giving more power to the equality aim (equally in the guise of a refusal of a specific treatment of women via the social-pedagogical allowance), are important contributions in this period by women MP's. In this way, women MP's succeeded in linking the parliamentary attention for women's interests more closely with the claims of the women's movement (De Weerd 1980, Van Mechelen 1979, Bollen 2001).

Just as in the previous period a division became apparent between interventions that aimed at promoting the working woman and interventions that aimed at promoting the mother staying at home. These points of view can be found within the women's movement that both emphasized to right to work and an equal treatment of women on the job market, as defended measures of difference to obtain an appreciation of the social role of mothers. The contents of emancipation, be it equal treatment or free choice, were subject to debate, both within the women's liberation movement as in parliament. The main reason to conclude that the claims of the women's liberation movement penetrated the political forum, is that the discord concerning part-time labour, bonuses for stay-at-home mothers and the social-pedagogical allowance, that existed within the women's movement as well was also present in the parliamentary debate. Women MP's put this feminist debate to the front within their fractions. This way they diversified the (direction of) the representation of women, what can be considered, as we stated earlier on, as an improvement of its quality.

4. Conclusion

Did a higher degree of descriptive representation (the presence and increase of women MP's and the presence of a female electorate) lead to more and better substantive representation ?

The question if (more) descriptive representation also means (more) substantive representation, has to be answered in a subtle way. The analysis of the number of interventions in favour of women by MP's during budget debates could not show a positive relation between the presence of women MP's and a female electorate on the one hand and the number of interventions in favour of women in parliament on the other. Just as the setting in of women MP's did not have an impact, the evolution of the number of women MP's did not have a significant influence on the number of interventions in favour of women.

The contribution of women MP's however, was important given the number of interventions in favour of women, and this was the case from the moment of their entry. They were also mainly responsible for the increase in the number of interventions in favour of women. Women MP's were overactive in representing women in proportion to their number. They devoted a higher priority to it and invested more time and energy in the attention for women's interests. They compensated their numeric underrepresentation by treating on average more groups of women and more subjects. Women appeared to be indeed the most fervent representatives of the female citizen. This great effort also testifies to the high degree of conscience of problems, and to the existing expertise. The conclusion that a very small group

of women MP's contributed significantly to representing women, adds to the conclusion of a series of other researches that showed that the presence of "*a few good women*" (Trimble 1997: 130) was essential to the representation of women.

Women MP's did not only contribute numerically, but also substantively to the representation of women. Although the presence of women MP's and voters did not provoke any drastic breaks as far as represented women and their interests were concerned, women MP's were the only ones to bring up certain groups of women and subjects. Moreover, women MP's participated in a normative debate on the role and position of women in society. In certain situations and concerning certain subjects, they broadened the dominant vision of what was in favour of women. They pushed back – though not radically – the boundaries of women's interests. Independently from the dominant vision within the parliament or the fraction they gave more importance to the equality or difference arguments or added new subjects to them. The broadening of the dominant political vision on women happened through the presenting of ideas, visions, fight points *and* discussions that were formulated by the women's movement. By diversifying women's interests, women MP's realized a higher congruence between the political attention for women's interests and the way women themselves perceived their interests. Next to this, according the right to vote to women is one of those context factors that has probably added to a diversification of the vision on 'women's interests'. To put it in short, our research shows that a higher degree of descriptive representation does actually improve substantive representation.

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Annex 1: Women MP's in the Belgian Lower House (1929-1979)

	Catholic party	Socialist party	Communist party	Liberal party	Flemish nationalist party	Francophone nationalist party
1929-36		Dejardin	Degeer-Adère			
1936-46		Dejardin Blume-Grégoire	Degeer-Adère			
1946-49	De Riemaecker-Legot	Fontaine-Borguet Blume-Grégoire	Grégoire-Cloes			
1949-50	Van Daele-Huys De Riemaecker-Legot	Fontaine-Borguet Blume-Grégoire Groesser- Schroyens	Raskin-Desonnay			
1950-54	Van Daele-Huys De Riemaecker-Legot Craeybeckx-Ory Fontaine-Van Hoof De Moor-Van Sina	Fontaine-Borguet Copée-Gerbinet Blume-Grégoire (independent from 1951 onwards) Groesser- Schroyens				
1954-58	Van Daele-Huys De Riemaecker-Legot Craeybeckx-Ory Fontaine-Van Hoof Gabriëlle De Moor-Van Sina	Fontaine-Borguet Copée-Gerbinet Lambert Groesser- Schroyens Vanderveken-Van de Plas				
1958-61	Van Daele-Huys De Riemaecker-Legot Craeybeckx-Ory De Moor-Van Sina	Fontaine-Borguet Copée-Gerbinet Lambert Dampremy-Prince Groesser- Schroyens Vanderveken-Van de Plas				
1961-65	Van Daele-Huys De Riemaecker-Legot Craeybeckx-Ory Devos Verlackt-Gevaert	Fontaine-Borguet Copée-Gerbinet Lambert Dampremy-Prince Groesser- Schroyens				

		Vanderveken-Van de Plas				
1965-68	De Riemaecker-Legot Craeybeckx-Ory Devos Verlackt-Gevaert	Copée-Gerbinet Groesser- Schroyens Vanderveken-Van de Plas		Mabille-Leblanc		
1968-71	De Riemaecker-Legot Craeybeckx-Ory Devos Verlackt-Gevaert	Copée-Gerbinet Groesser- Schroyens		Mabille-Leblanc Duclos		
1971-74	Craeybeckx-Ory Devos Verlackt-Gevaert	Copée-Gerbinet	Dinant	Duclos	Vander Eecken- Maes	
1974-77	Craeybeckx-Ory Devos Verlackt-Gevaert De Meester-De Meyer Dielens Janssen-Peeraer Steyaert Ryckmans-Corin	Pétry Huybrechts-Adriaensens Brenez	Dinant	D'Haeseleer	Martens-De Kegel Vander Eecken- Maes	Spaak Mathieu-Mohin
1977-78	Devos Wivina De Meester-De Meyer De Paepe-De Weweire Demeulenaere-Dewilde Greta Dielens Rika Steyaert Boeraeve-Derycke Vandenbussche-Tyberghien	Detiège Huybrechts-Adriaensens Brenez		Diane D'Haeseleer	Vander Eecken- Maes	Spaak Banneux
1978-81	Devos De Meester-De Meyer De Paepe-De Weweire Demeulenaere-Dewilde Dielens	Detiège Huybrechts-Adriaensens Brenez	Dinant	Duclos		Spaak Banneux

Smet
 Steyaert (tot 1987)
 Ryckmans-Corin
 Vandenbussche-Tyberghien

Annex 2 Average % female members of the political fractions in the Belgian Lower House

	1930-34	1935-39	1940-49	1950-54	1955-59	1960-64	1965-69	1970-74	1975-79
Socialist	1,4 %	2,2 %	2,0 %	5,2 %	6,2 %	7,1 %	3,9 %	2,7 %	5,1 %
Catholic	/	/	0,7 %	3,7 %	4,5 %	4,6 %	5,3 %	5,0 %	10,6 %
Communist	/	9,0 %	4,9 %	/	/	/	2,1 %	8,0 %	25,0 %
Liberal	/	/	/	/	/	/	2,7 %	2,5 %	1,5 %
Fl. nationalist	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	2,9 %	7,0 %
Fr. nationalist	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	17,5 %

Source: Van Molle en Gubin 1998: 372-376, Gerard 2003: 453. Own calculation.